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TIME, THE AVENGER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“EMILIA WYNDHAM,” “THE WILMINGTONS,” &c.

“The Word dwelt with me, and its inward light,
By anguish aided, and adversity,
Wrought in my heart an inward change entire.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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TIME, THE AVENGER.

CHAPTER I.

“See, thy fertilizing river
Now hath stray'd from out its bed;
All thy springs and gushing fountains
Now are dried up at the head.”

Mrs. SELWYN and Lilla sat at a late breakfast the next morning, idly sipping their tea, and enjoying the cheerful interest women ever find in talking over a last night's ball. They were both of them in excellent spirits—perfectly well satisfied each with her own particular share of the entertainment.

Mrs. Selwyn, as chaperon, had acquired the

distinction of bringing out the acknowledged belle of the evening. For, whether the beauty of her form and face, the elegance of her dress, or her charming dancing was considered, in every way Lilla Fleming had excelled all the other girls in the room. There was no end to the admiration she had inspired.

With this second-hand flattery Mrs. Selwyn, who was abundantly good-natured, and not very wise, was delighted and excited in no ordinary degree; and would have felt abundantly repaid for the trouble of dressing and going out, even, had not dressing and going out been the things she liked best in the world to do.

Moreover, Mrs. Selwyn had, as she paraded up and down, here and there, perceived, from time to time, in the large mirrors which adorned the walls of the gay ball-room, the reflection of, as she thought, a remarkably good-looking woman; most splendidly and becomingly attired in a large turban of Indian brocade, a priceless scarf from the same region, and a dress which, in magnificence, really did

exceed, and, as she thought, in taste exceeded every other dress in the room. And let philosophers say what they will about the matter, there is something in the consciousness of being particularly well dressed which affords a satisfaction to the wisest man—let alone a foolish woman.

But the crowning triumph of the evening had been that her predictions as to Valentine Daubeney had been fulfilled. Valentine Daubeney was there, as she had prognosticated, and more delightful and more admired than ever. And it was as clear as noon-day that he was not insensible to the charms of Lilla Fleming; nay, that she had made a very great impression upon him—in short, quite effected a conquest of the vagrant heart.

The imagination of women like Mrs. Selwyn travels very fast when what they call a conquest is made. All sorts of pleasant visions had been floating in the good lady's brain ever since.

A wooing, in which she was to be the confidante—wedding clothes, as to which she was

to be the grand adviser—a wedding breakfast, of which she was to have the sole direction—intimacy with the Daubeneys, which she had always desired, but some way had never achieved—a pretty, elegant household set up for the young people, where she should ever be welcome—in short, there was just that mixture of good-natured interest in other people's happiness, and many visions of increase to her own, which occupy the minds of women like Mrs. Selwyn when a marriage is in the wind.

Lilla, too, was in excellent spirits.

She had spent a delightful evening; she never had been at such a charming ball in her life before; and as for the dancing, it was quite delightful. Such a band! never was music so well played, or the selection of tunes so good.

“And,—and,—the partners,” cries Mrs. Selwyn, endeavouring to look very meaning.—“Oh, you have nothing to say of the partners to be sure, my dear; perhaps don't even recollect them,—forgot their names probably,” looking more and more clever and meaning,

as she thought, at every sentence.—“ Oh, dear! the partners had nothing to do with the charms of the evening.”

“ No, to be sure,—how should they ?” said Lilla, laughing ; “ one’s partner of course, you know, is nothing.”

“ Oh, you naughty girl !—what stories I do believe you can tell. But you may as well own the truth at once to me, you know,—*is* he not a delightful young man ?”

“ He’s very pretty, I believe, if you mean Valentine Daubeney by all this,” said the young lady, with a little affected carelessness.

“ Only very pretty !—Is that all you have to say for the man ? And such a man ! I declare I think him the handsomest, most elegant, fashionably enchanting creature I ever saw in my life, and perfectly irresistible. At least so I should find him, if I were like you, Miss Fleming.”

“ Why like me ? I am not, I hope, so particularly easy to be captivated, as to find any young gentleman I have only passed three separate quarters of three separate hours with

irresistible—and I believe that's about the time I spent in his company."

"Well, you cold-hearted thing! Is not that long enough in *such* company?"

"No," said Lilla, "not for me."

"Well, you really *are* provoking. I can't think why you must be so precise. Can you pretend to be wholly indifferent to a charming being like that who, on his side, seems ready to worship you?"

"That would be something," said Lilla, rather pensively. "Yes," after a little thoughtful silence she broke out, "that *is* true, Mrs. Selwyn; to be loved *is* a happiness,—I have not had much of it. I don't call mere idle flirting, flattering, that,—but,—” checking herself,—“what is anything he can say, or pretend to feel, more than mere idle flattery? You told me yourself he was the greatest flirt in existence.”

"Did I say so? That was a strange ill-natured speech of mine, if I said so; yet, one must own he has been a flirt, but take my word for it that's over now. If I ever saw a

young man fall in love at first sight, that's what Valentine Daubeney did last night, Lilla Fleming."

"Pooh, nonsense!" she said.

"No such nonsense, my dear, as you pretend to think—and, as a proof, do you know what he has asked leave to do——?"

"No, certainly, dear Mrs. Selwyn, how should I guess what it might enter into his head to ask leave to do—or care either," added Lilla, with an air of affected indifference.

"Oh! very well; you don't want to know, perhaps.—Very well, I'll keep it to myself, then, and his visit too, I need say nothing about.—As far as outward professions go, indeed, it is merely intended for me."

"Visit!—I thought you didn't visit the Daubeney's."

"No more we do, my dear. Your Uncle, I was going to say—I mean my brother, and old Daubeney, are quite in a different line. They meet upon 'Change of course, and all that sort of thing, but nobody can know and visit *all* the rich men in the city—and, besides,

old Mr. and Mrs. Daubeney are very quiet sort of people ; they don't go out much, and they seldom or never give dinners, so nobody knows much about them.—It's Valentine that everybody is acquainted with."

" Well, but I thought you said something of a visit."

" Well, but I thought you cared nothing about it."

" No more I do."

" Oh, fie ! fie !" shaking her finger at her in what she intended for a very humorous manner.

" Not in the way you think, at least," answered Lilla ; " I speak the truth whether you will believe me or not."

And she did speak the truth. The reflections of the morning had dissipated the enchantments of the night. The heart of the fair young creature had resisted the fascinations of Valentine. She felt happier than she had lately been, because the strange influence which had oppressed her, seemed weakened, and in some degree dissipated, by these new impres-

sions ; but she remained quite as much the mistress of her affections, as far as Valentine was concerned, as she pretended to be.

Mrs. Selwyn was, however, far too great an admirer of Valentine, and had far too little real discernment, to believe her. That young ladies should tell stories when the state of their hearts was in question, appeared to her far more probable than that any one could help falling in love with Valentine Daubeney, —when Valentine Daubeney seemed inclined to fall in love with them.

And yet, in spite of this indifference, Lilla could not help feeling some curiosity about this visit. She was not insensible to the pleasure of being beloved. To her disappointed feelings, to be beloved had an indescribable charm,—even though it were to be beloved by the wrong person.

So she continued the subject with :—

“ I am sure, Mrs. Selwyn, I am not surprised that the visit should be dedicated to you. It's very natural that everybody should like to be acquainted with you,—you, who

live in such a charming place, and are so very pleasant and good-natured to all the world. And I dare say that this young Mr. Daubeney told you all this in his most blanditious way, for I am afraid he is a sad flatterer."

"I dare say.—No, he has too much penetration to try his flattery upon me,—I know the world too well to be easily taken in either with fair speeches or fine outsides.—"

So particularly well do foolish people understand themselves.

"And Valentine has sense enough to discover that in a twinkling. No, what he talked to me about was my flowers; which, he said, were celebrated all the country round—and, indeed, Griffiths is a treasure,—only, some way, he does not succeed with the rarer bulbs and heaths quite so well as with the commoner sorts. Many of those things he manages to lose every year; but with the rather more common species there never was such a man. I am sure the *Pelargoniums*, this year, might rival Mrs. Lawrence herself. Indeed, I think my gardener might obtain the prize,—and .."

“ And so Mr. Daubeney did not venture to flatter you, because he saw you had no weak side to flatter,—he merely praised your flowers. Was that it?” said Lilla, with a little, meaning smile.

“ Yes, to be sure. To please one by talking of that which interests one the most is what every well-bred person docs; and Valentine Daubeney is particularly well-bred. So, as I was telling you, he began to talk to me of my flowers, and to tell me that they were celebrated throughout the whole neighbourhood and the beauty of my garden, as well—and, in short, he said so much that I could do no less than reply, that I should have great pleasure in showing them to him—and he said he should be delighted to come,—and so, my dear, he is coming this very day to luncheon, that he may walk over the grounds with me.”

Lilla laughed.

Mrs. Selwyn saw that she was not ill-pleased, and she was in high good-humour herself at the idea of receiving her expected visitor. For whether Lilla was captivated or not, it is very

certain that Mrs. Selwyn was as much so as it was seemly for a lady of her years to be.

Luncheon is set out with more than the usual abundance and elegance of Mrs. Selwyn's luncheons. This good lady very well understood the power exercised over young gentlemen's imaginations by a plentiful and *recherché* table; and that Cupid's traps are not the worse baited, because a *cotelette à la soubise* and a *matelotte aux maqueraux* are added to the attractions of a lovely face, charming spirits, and a sweet disposition.

She was a match-maker in grain. Strange that it had never entered into her head to employ her powers in favour of her brother; but some way she had accustomed herself to look upon him as one so completely out of the question, and so particularly out of the sphere of her own influence, that she never calculated upon him as a piece to be moved in her game of life.

With all her boasted discernment and knowledge of the world, it will surprise nobody to hear that Mrs. Selwyn had not the slightest suspicion of the secret passion which agitated Mr. Craiglethorpe's soul, under the strange disguises which it assumed. In perfect ignorance of any such thing, her whole attention and interest were engrossed in the delightful occupation of making up the match between Lilla and the delightful Valentine Daubeney, who was wealthy as he was charming. — And Mrs. Selwyn was far from forgetting this circumstance; for with all her romance, no one could be more sensible to the glory that would arise from securing a splendid establishment, as well as a very handsome young man for her beautiful friend, than she was.

She ordered the luncheon to be set out in a little breakfast-room, a particularly favourite apartment, both with herself and Lilla.

It was a little room fitted up with all those beautiful things that rich ladies like to put into such places; quite a charming little place,—with its pale sea-green and crimson silk

hangings, looking like a great big flower, about fifteen by twelve. The curtains in their folds and draperies being put up together so artistically, with this beautiful rich crimson intermingled, just as you may see a blushing camelia in full blow. A forest of leaves and richly coloured flowers. Then the consoles had a greater variety of colours in china cups, rare bits of glass, grotesque teapots, and fanciful shepherds and shepherdesses, than almost any one ever saw before ; to say nothing of the variety of chairs, not two alike, and of sofas, and *causeuses*, and couches, all upon a small scale proportioned to the room ; but all so pretty ! The walls were beautifully painted in panels, and the carpet was like moss sprinkled with delicate flowers, and, in short, nothing could be more gay. Moreover, this charming little room opened upon a verandah where there were always abundance of flowers, and it was this day filled with the most beautiful that could be collected from the green-houses and conservatories. There were also sundry pyramidical stages of baskets in the room, filled

with moss-roses, myrtles, and geraniums, and fringed all round with the streamers of the blue nemophila and the tropeoleum canariensis, with its light-yellow flowers falling from the basket to the ground.

I have enlarged upon the description of the room, because I want you to fancy the scene just as it was.

There stood a moderately-sized round table in the middle, a part of the intended luncheon was already set out upon japan china plates and dishes; the fruit being disposed in silver filligree baskets, piled up among leaves and flowers, so as to make, in itself, a picture; and, upon a little slip of a sideboard, a few bottles of choice wine, and some few glasses of beautiful forms, and clear as crystal, were sparkling.

It all looked very nice and pleasing,—not oppressive, not too much of a thing,—almost like an Arabian tale; imaginative—delicate—elegant.

Whatever else Mrs. Selwyn understood, in matters such as these, it must be owned she was unrivalled.

The two ladies sat in this delicious little room, the one netting, the other embroidering. Lilla was listlessly engaged in manufacturing a purse which she had in more comfortable days intended for Mr. Craiglethorpe, but which now she cared not to finish, as she had no one to give it to, for it was of too robust a texture to do for Mrs. Selwyn. Mrs. Selwyn herself was busied in the never-ending task of working a carpet in small pieces, to be afterwards joined together. You must not fancy a great lumbering piece of carpet-work, littering and spoiling the effect of this room of rooms.

The elder lady looked all complacency and satisfaction. Now and then she rose from her work, and altered the position of a flower, or some ornament, or some chair ; then she sat down again, again glanced round, and confessed to herself that all was perfect. The younger never looked up from her netting, though the fingers that once used to move so rapidly at her work, now lingered over the task. She seemed lost in a reverie, and so she was.

The beautiful objects which surrounded her

had little power to charm uneasy thought, or soften the hidden pains of the heart. Accustomed to luxury, in the highest degree, from her childhood, luxury had lost, it may rather be said had never possessed, the power of exciting the sense of happiness in her. These things were but necessities of existence. She was so accustomed to them that she heeded them not,—she saw them not. Had they been absent she might have missed them, perhaps. So far the possession of them diminished the chance of happiness, to which they could add nothing.

She was musing—what about?

The last night's ball, may be. Yes, the gay scene swam before her mental eye, and amidst the splendid profusion of light and colours, a countenance full of gaiety and sweetness, with the beautiful brown hair curling round it, and illuminated by smiling eyes, was present,—but that vision soon passed away, and another succeeded, of a far different character. It was as a dark sketch by some old hand, but powerful master, after a picture of Greuse or

Watteau. A Spagnoletti or a Bassano.—Dark sullen, gloomy, severe ; almost painful to look upon, but deeply earnest in its tone and expression. A something by the side of which the sweet colouring of the amiable French artists, would appear feeble, trifling, and uninteresting.

That eye so penetrating, so earnest—those flashes of anger, of passion—that stern, haggard face—that spare, sinewy form—so full of simplicity and truth in every unlovely gesture !

She could not drive the spectral form away—it was persistent—there it remained. For a moment she had believed herself emancipated from her thralldom ; but the image had returned with more than usual power, and she sat there magnetized by it. Ah ! why was he so cold—so indifferent—so insensible—so cruelly implacable—so harsh and so unkind ? Why should charms, of which all the world confessed the power, prove alone powerless for him ?

He positively seemed to dislike what every body else loved in her—her playful sallies, her gay spirits, and careless daring. She had, till

she met him, been accustomed to be indulged by every one who approached her, and to have every little mischievous trick which she so loved to play, forgiven, in favour of the sweet smiles which accompanied it. She had been accustomed to be made an idol of by all ; and, save her father, to have no idol of her own.

And now, this grim image was enshrined in the inner sanctuary of the temple, and the young and devoted worshipper bowed before it in vain.

She was, in imagination, somewhat ruefully forming to herself a picture somewhat of this description, when the door-bell rang.

CHAPTER II.

“There, spent with thought, he listless eyed
The course of Greta’s playful tide,—
Beneath her banks now eddying dun,
Now brightly gleaming to the sun,
As, dancing over rock and stone,
In yellow light her currents shone.”

ROKEBY.

I THINK you would have confessed that Miss Fleming was the most extraordinary girl you had ever met with, if she could have remained absorbed in these reflections *à la Bassano* and *à la Spagnoletti* after the door had opened and admitted Valentine Daubeney, the picture of youth and gaiety.—Fresh as the breeze upon an early May morning—smiling as the day-beam upon a sunny landscape—bright as the sunshine sparkling upon dew.

He was charmed to keep his engagement with Mrs. Selwyn—and had been counting the

minutes till it was time to come ; for he had been quite intoxicated with the beauty of Miss Fleming the evening before, and he had passed the hours since they parted in visions of wild delight at the idea that he was so soon to see her again.

In truth, he had fallen—for the first time in his life—deeply and sincerely in love. Yet, according to the happy frame of his temper and spirits, the felicity of so sudden and enthusiastic an admiration was not marred by the smallest portion of that anxiety and self-distrust which almost invariably attend upon a heart-felt attachment.

Admired, flattered, almost idolized, he was accustomed to be ; but this would not have of itself accounted for this very agreeable absence of the more sorrowful signs of a true passion. It was his buoyant, sanguine disposition, his habit of always believing that everything he was to aspire to was to be obtained—everything he undertook to prosper ; which maintained the flow of his spirits—rather than self-conceit or self-flattery. His were spirits no anticipation

of difficulty could cloud, no anxiety depress. At once he had over-leaped the only barrier which separated him from his charmer, by introducing himself into the house of Mrs. Selwyn. All the rest was to follow as a matter of course. At present he was only alive to the pleasure of success, in thus having secured admission to her, and to the delight of seeing her again.

Joy danced in his eyes—it broke forth in his sunny smiles—it sounded, in his ringing, light-hearted laughter. His were all happy sensations. The gay spirit of complete happiness was dancing through his veins. Yet this was all only the natural effect of his light and sanguine temper: there was not, as I said above, the slightest approach to vanity, or undue self-confidence in the delightful ease with which he entered the room and addressed his charmer.

In fact, he was one not in the habit of being engrossed by himself, or of dwelling upon the effect he might produce. He pleased without effort—as the mere effect of the charming gaiety of his manners. He pleased the more,

because he thought little about it. Alas! for the dangers which, in this world of temptation, beset a character like this, and against which, poor young fellow! he had never been properly armed.

He came into the room, looking so bright and charming that it was like the sunshine coming in. His good humour and gaiety were infectious—were irresistible; he seemed to cast a sort of illumination over every company of which he made a part.

The young lady dropped the purse she was netting from between her fingers as she gave him her hand; and, under the influence of his bright presence, once more the painful images which had been occupying her fancy vanished as it were into dim obscurity.

“So when the sun
Pillows his chin upon the Orient wave,—
The fleeting shadows pale
Troop to the infernal jail,
Each fettered ghost slips to its several grave.”

And the day bursts forth, and all nature

is fresh, and bright, and glittering in the gay morning beam ; and birds break out in singing to welcome the new-born day, and all the gloomy spectres of darkness “fly after the night steeds.”

She felt again, as if the potent charm of some dark sorcerer had been broken, and she, restored to breath and liberty. Valentine sat down by her, and fell at once to talking so gaily and agreeably—his manner had so much delightful animation—his voice was at once so soft and so lively—his looks so sweet and so full of happiness—he was so evidently in the highest spirits at finding himself there, that it was impossible to resist the infection of his joy.

Soon, every painful thought was dissipated, she knew not how. By and by they all sat down to the table. The hot luncheon came up. They talked, they laughed, they enjoyed themselves. Lilla soon cheered up, and was as merry as Valentine. It was almost like the revival of a long-forgotten sensation to feel herself happy. Gay, happy, free from anxiety or care as she used to be in old

days at Beyrout, and as she had never been since she left it.

Oh, how lovely she looked, thus dressed up in smiles ! and how excessively happy he felt himself by her side ! and how he laughed and rattled away ; and how Mrs. Selwyn laughed and enjoyed herself very much !

It sounded very merry through the windows, which were thrown open, and looked upon the garden. But there was one at that moment standing in that garden, to whose ear the sweet harmony of youthful, happy voices jarred like the most hideous discord ; every fibre of whose soul was vibrating with an irritation amounting almost to agony, as he caught the gay sounds, and distinguished the voices within.

Mr. Craiglethorpe, contrary to his usual custom, had that day ridden down in the forenoon to his sister's house. Some matter of business connected with hers, or, it may be, with Miss Fleming's affairs, had brought him down thus early.

You may smile, and fancy that you know

better than to admit the pretence, and that where Lilla was, it was but too natural he should sometimes ride down in a morning, without needing the excuse of business.

I can only tell you that you know the man but indifferently well if you think so.

He had the courage to stay away when he chose, and he chose to do it in the morning. This day there really was a call of business to bring him down.

He had ridden, as he usually did, into the stable-yard, without ringing at the door-bell—had asked whether the mistress was at home, and whether there was any company; and being merely answered that there was company at luncheon, said he would go into the garden, and wait till they were gone; and accordingly he had turned his steps that way. He was in a very gloomy humour, and felt himself particularly ill-inclined to meet strange faces.

The night Miss Fleming had spent at the fancy ball had been one little short of torture to Mr. Craiglethorpe.

Her image haunted him with a persistence he found it impossible to shake off. He saw her looking more beautiful than ever, with her colour slightly raised by dancing, her bright eyes sparkling with pleasure, dispensing her smiles upon all surrounders; talking, laughing; worse than all, coquetting, in a way it drove him wild with jealousy to dwell upon, and yet which he could not help dwelling upon. The vision possessed him—haunted him—he could not get rid of it—and yet it drove him almost mad.

He had really been afraid to trust himself in the way of this ball. For the first time in his life, he had felt an insane wish to be there. A new power was taking possession of him, mastering him, impelling him with a blind infatuation to follow wherever she was; to watch her every look and gesture—though every look and gesture was but a cause of fresh distress—was as poison—was as piercing steel to his heart. He felt that he was ceasing to be his own master.

Every day he was more obstinately resolved

to resist this infatuation — this degrading infatuation, as his pride regarded it. Every day, a power, too great to be controlled, seemed forcing him forward in the path he had resolved to tear his heart out rather than pursue.

It is a fierce struggle between a strong man and his own passions, especially when the man is left unassisted, to fight it out as best he may. And such was the case here.

There were no lofty principles of duty—no sense of acknowledgement of responsibility to higher claims than those of this brief world and its feelings here—no habitual sense of the existence of better scenes and nobler exercises of power at the thought of which the most ardent sensibilities are calmed and restrained —none of these aids in the dread darkness of this chaos of the passions, to shed light over, and speak peace to, the warring elements within.

Nothing but his strong self against his strong self!

Fierce and dreadful contention!

His invincible pride against the strange

weakness of this irresistible and incongruous love!

Upon the day of the ball, he had engaged himself to dine out at a grand city feast, in order that he might find it impossible to change his mind and go; but, oh! what an evening it had proved!

Oh! how oppressive did he find this large and somewhat noisy company of men around him, who, just returned from their counting-houses, and elevated by the success of prosperous transactions, were enjoying the present hour as much as they possibly could,—eating, and drinking, and talking, and laughing; whilst knives were rattling—plates clashing—silver covers shining—grand *épergnes* dazzling—footmen running about—a man coming every moment to his elbow with a new dish or a fresh wine—talk, talk, talk—eat, eat, eat—laugh, laugh, laugh—summons to take wine—nods to this, call from that!

It fretted him to the very soul—he could hardly keep his seat—he did *not* keep his temper. It was all he could do to help burst-

ing out into some extravagant ebullition or other ; he had never been in such a state in his life before. And all for this heedless, silly, mocking girl !

That last thought it was which drove him almost mad.

He was a man, as you know, accustomed to have his humours tolerated by his friends, and to do very much as he liked in most companies. So his strange, sulky humour passed without remark ; and this was the only—but was some slight—alleviation of the pain and irritation of that evening.

As early as he decently could, he took leave, and went straight home to his lodgings.

There he went up to his sitting-room. The window, which looked upon the street, chanced to be open ; for it was a fine night. Carriages were running up and down, and the lamps gleaming from distance to distance, and from side to side. He went to the window, and there he sat down ; and he leaned his two arms upon the window-sill, and his head upon his arms. The fresh night-air gave him a

feeling of refreshment about the temples—the only refreshment that could reach him. So there he sat on.

Sometimes he lifted up his head, and watched the carriages as they rolled by ; sometimes he listened to the sullen toll of Paul's telling the midnight hours. Paul's tolled them all ; but Mr. Craiglethorpe remained where he was.

He could not and did not go to bed that night.

He sat there till daybreak, neither meditating nor reflecting, but as if in a sort of dull dream of misery which he could not arouse himself from. One scene of wretchedness after another passed, present and to come, succeeding in painful array ; and every one bringing its own peculiar pain.

At daybreak, he flung himself as he was upon his bed, and slept uneasily for a few hours ; but he got up at the proper time, and went into the City as usual, doing everything that was to be done with his accustomed regularity. He could not, however, help feeling

really glad when the occasion presented itself, which rendered a ride down to his sister's necessary.

When he heard there was company at luncheon, not being in a very sociable mood, he turned into the garden; and the sound from the little breakfast-room was the balsam prepared for his wounded nerves when he arrived there. He had threaded the winding labyrinth of walks, which soon brought him into the neighbourhood of the verandah, and of the open window of the breakfast-room, from which issued these cheerful sounds.

The Evil Spirit, when he looked into Paradise, might have felt something of the cruel envy which at that moment agitated Mr. Craiglethorpe's bosom; but the demon himself had not the pangs of that cruellest of passions, aggravated by the jealousy of a proud, yet slighted love.

Talking and laughing sound so merry, so prodigiously merry, to those who stand by and take no part. Even in indifferent cases, this is so. But now the gay laughs, the slightly

elevated voice of Miss Fleming, irritated him like a wrong.

In the injustice of his passion, he contrasted his misery with her gaiety ;—it seemed to him like a fresh proof of her utter indifference to his feelings, to be thus happy, and he so much the reverse.

His sufferings wanted but one aggravation, —it was not long in coming.

He heard a strange voice,—only one strange voice. There was no party then, as he had understood from the servant,—nothing to be called company. There was only one voice,—a voice he recognized at once,—a young man's voice ; and how detestably he laughed ! Like a fool,—none but fools were for ever laughing ; but women loved fools,—that was the way to please them. An idle, rattling, giggling fool ! That was the way to their hearts.

He hurried away in a rage.

The gay sounds pursued him,—followed him wherever he went. The grounds were not large enough for him to escape them, and the party were very merry.

Presently the gay company seemed to approach. They had evidently left the house through the window. Now they were in the verandah, and he heard them discussing the flowers, and little exclamations of delight from the young girl, mingled with the young man's gay rattle,—his tongue was incessantly going, his talk only interrupted by what seemed to Mr. Craiglethorpe that detestable laugh,—that empty, idiot laugh !

He ought to have left the garden,—he knew that he ought. What business had he there, listening in bitter contempt to the thoughtless sallies of youth and high spirits? People have no right to go on indulging in this way their pettish vexation at the enjoyment of others ; these things have almost as bad an effect as an evil eye. If Mr. Craiglethorpe's eye could have possessed the power, and could have blighted all this pleasant society at one glance, I am afraid the glance would have been given.

The walks wound about in an intricate manner in this garden. Where he stood he com-

manded a good position, though hidden himself by a turn, and a large thicket of arbutus. Suddenly the party which had now left the verandah entered this very walk, and gave him the opportunity of enjoying the personal appearance of the fool whose empty laughter he had so heartily despised.

And I leave any man to guess—who is no longer young, who never had been good-looking, and who is now positively ugly—of the agreeable sensation produced, by seeing his place by the side of the woman he adores, occupied by one of the handsomest, most agreeable, and gentlemanlike young fellows he had ever beheld, who was talking, with every appearance of the most favourable hearing, to the lovely creature beside him.

I leave any one to imagine the feeling with which Mr. Craiglethorpe stood for a few moments transfixed, watching the little party, until every doubt of the favourable attention that young man's prattle obtained was dispelled. And with what bitterness of soul, without deigning to give vent to one sigh of

regret, he turned suddenly away and left the garden.

The business he came upon was left to take its chance. The next day, and the next day, and the next day, passed by, but Mr. Craighthorpe appeared at the Forest no more.

He left the field open to his rival, whom he knew at the first glance to be Valentine Daubeney. To contend with such a one at all he held to be unworthy of him, but the idea of contending in vain was still more insupportable. In spite of his amiable qualities, when he weighed the real worth of Valentine against his own, he felt—he knew himself to be the better. He had a proud satisfaction in the consciousness that, after all, she was throwing herself away. He had a cruel comfort in suspecting the many reasons she might find to repent her choice, in thus preferring the engaging flatterer to the strong, earnest, truthful man,—the superficial attractions of the one to his own deep, devoted passion.

Yes, passion does justice to itself in this. However much we may misprize our external

attractions, every one feels in himself the value of a deep, fervent, changeless love.

This was Mr. Craiglethorpe's proud consolation, this conviction of the priceless worth of a love such as he could have given her,—however by her, as he thought, despised,—weighed against any feelings, let them be what they might, which could belong to a character of no real solidity, such as Valentine's. But where he did wrong, where he did wickedly, where he erred to the highest degree, was when he allowed himself to find in this conviction a secret consolation,—a consolation upon which he brooded with a barbarous tenacity. He had not generosity enough to desire her happiness, if he was not to constitute it. In his injustice he resented her indifference, as if it were a crime; and, wounded to the quick in that most sensitive part—his pride—he cared little what became of her, so that she should not find with another that felicity which he was unable to bestow.

And so to gratify these implacable feelings,

he left her, as we shall see, without remorse, exposed to the fascinations of a man he knew to be most seducing, and of whose steadiness and intrinsic worth he had the greatest reason to doubt. He measured the depth of the precipice to which he believed her to be hastening; and yet he would not stretch out a finger to save her.

No; the absurdity of his passion should never be made a subject of ridicule for her and her happy lover. He would prove his indifference; and at the same time soothe his galled feelings, by avoiding the least appearance of interest upon the subject, and by abstaining, let things go as they might, from the slightest interference. And thus, under the influence of these mingled passions, did this man, in the main neither unprincipled, ill-disposed, nor hard-hearted, abandon the sacred duties with which his friend had invested him. A prey to the rankling tortures of his pride and of his love,—absorbed only by self and his own sufferings,—he abandoned a young creature, scarcely yet out of her girlhood, to

the assiduities of a man he did not esteem, and believed would not make her happy ; and she under the sole guardianship too, of a silly woman, whose understanding no one could despise more than he did himself.

Such were Mr. Craiglethorpe's proceedings, even when there had not been the slightest ground for personal offence ; unfortunately, however, causes for personal offence could not but arise, when two gay and giddy young creatures were thrown into this peculiar but hidden relation, with the heart of the stern but sensitive man ;—offence which, during the long course of years which had since elapsed, he had never forgiven. No, not until the deep self-abasement he had lately felt, had broken down, as it were, the intrenchments of his pride, and aroused the better and juster spirit which slumbered within him.

CHAPTER III.

"Distinguish'd much by reason, and still more
By our capacity of grace divine,
. . . . we are held
Accountable; and God, some future day,
Will reckon with us roundly."

COWPER.

MRS. SELWYN TO MR. CRAIGLETHORPE.

My dear brother,

IT is an age since you have been down to see us ; what on earth keeps you away ?

You really ought to come. Things, I assure you, are taking quite a desirable turn ; and if you don't take care, I shall have disposed of Lilla Fleming, and she will have disposed of herself, before you, her guardian, know anything about it. Really, if I did not know you so *thoroughly* as I do, I should half believe

there was a *reason* for your staying away so pertinaciously. A little time ago you used to be here every day ; and why, brother, when a lover is on the *tapis*, and you ought, surely, of all times in the world, to be here ; here you never come, I cannot conceive. You had taken quite a habit of coming when there was no particular necessity for it, though I was so *very* glad to see you, you know—and now, when there really is a reason *why* you should be on the spot, you stay away.

As I was wondering at what the reason of your strange conduct could be, an odd thought came into my head. If I could ever have believed you capable of anything of the sort, I could almost have fancied you had fallen in love with Miss Fleming yourself, and did not like to see her about to be carried off by another. Don't be angry, it was only one among a thousand conjectures which will come into one's head. Don't believe I entertained it seriously for a moment. However, pray come, or there's no knowing what people may suspect. Valentine Daubeney is here every

day, and all day long. He has not proposed yet, but I expect he will pop the question every time he comes; and there can be little doubt of what the answer will be. I really wish you would come down. I want to hear what you will have to say about it, though there *can* be but one thing for any rational creature to say; for Valentine is a delightful young man, and the Daubeneys are a most respectable family, and as rich as can be. And Valentine is an only son—an only child, indeed. So if you made an objection, which you really can't, I should attribute it to sheer envy; but it would be ridiculous to imagine you would make any. However, do come.

Your affectionate sister,

ELLA SELWYN.

This letter of his sister's brought Mr. Craiglethorpe down to the Forest immediately.

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.

And conscience it was which gave to this

common-place letter a power such as the most pregnant words can seldom command.

That an idea of the nature she alluded to could have entered into the head of his gossiping sister, was wormwood to him. He felt offended in the sacredness of his hidden love—degraded by the implied weakness—offended by the very terms in which she expressed her disbelief.

The universal opinion which seemed to prevail, that for him to fall in love was an idea too ridiculous to be seriously entertained by any one, hurt him more than all the rest.

As the best answer to all these half-suspicions, he resolved to ride down to the Forest immediately, to show his indifference by abstaining from all interference—not the interest he ought to have taken—interfere he would not.

He was afraid of justifying his sister's half-suspicions, if he made the least opposition to the match, or attempted to oppose any of her schemes, and therefore he determined to be passive.

He resented, unjust as was the feeling, and of its injustice he was quite aware—so deeply resented Miss Fleming's preference for another, that he made up his mind to stand by and leave her to take her chance with a young man whom he knew to be unworthy of her.

The exquisite pain this determination occasioned him hid from him, in some measure, I believe, the ungenerous nature of his conduct.

A delusion not uncommon.

In the meantime, this continued absence, this total cessation of all communication since their quarrel, had convinced Miss Fleming not only of his insensibility, but of the harshness and implacability of his temper. She could not help contrasting the yearning of her own heart for a reconciliation with the cold indifference of his.

In spite of the charm of Valentine's society, and the delusive pleasure of his flattery and admiration, for many, many days; her heart was, in its moments of reaction, when she was left to her own thoughts, and her young admirer was gone, still unsatisfied. Nay, even

at times, in the very midst of his blandishments, that heart—that true and constant heart of hers—was longing after the absent.

Valentine gone, she caught herself thinking much more of Mr. Craiglethorpe's contempt and anger, than of her young lover's passionate admiration, which amounted almost to idolatry,—of the sullen gloom, the determined unforgivingness, the invincible coldness, of the one, rather than of the gay adorations, the fervour, the tenderness of the other.

At last she began to blame herself for this. She began to take herself to task for an infatuation, which led her to bestow so much thought upon one who never thought of her—to the injury of one who seemed to think and care for nothing else. What a contrast to the usual history of a young girl's heart! She had to struggle against, to chase from her heart, affections built upon esteem for the sterner, the severer, but more solid character—and to argue herself, as it were, into rewarding by her love that which was so truly loveable, so truly capable of fascinating a young heart

and fancy, as the attachment of the amiable, the flattering, the devoted Valentine.

A feeling of secret reproach at her own ingratitude for this tenderness and devotion, a devotion which the contrast with the invincible unkindness of Mr. Craiglethorpe rendered only the more striking, began gradually to prevail over other feelings, and thus, at length, in this divided heart, the strong prepossession, the strange sympathy which had bound her to the one, began to give way—or appear to give way—before the happiness of being beloved and the charm of so much sweetness and good humour.

It is not unnatural that, in this state of her feelings, she should take a sort of pleasure in depreciating the one character, and exalting to herself the qualities of the other ; or that she should suffer Valentine, who, for some reason or other,—probably because he had a secret consciousness of not standing high in the opinion of that gentleman—took pleasure in depreciating Mr. Craiglethorpe, to amuse himself, and endeavour to amuse her, by holding

up his peculiarities to ridicule. A thing he would do with so much drollery as to provoke many a laugh in spite of herself, and in spite too of a certain soreness of feeling which would make itself felt whenever the subject was mentioned.

It is a charming day at the end of July, and the Forest is in all its glory. The old thorns and the scraggy ancient elms, are mingled with the limes in the full softness of their verdure, and perfuming the air with their blossoms. The sun in his splendour is careering through a deep blue and cloudless sky. It is between four and five o'clock, and Mr. Craiglethorpe, musing and sullen, out of sorts, and out of spirits, is riding through the forest glades towards his sister's house.

As he proceeds, sometimes he makes a return upon himself, and, wondering why he is there, is half tempted to turn his horse's head and go to London. Sometimes he feels his heart beating with an almost wild emotion, and the colour mounting to his pale face, at the thought,

at the certainty, that in a few minutes he shall, he must, again see that lovely one,—that mistress of his inmost heart.

At times his sensations are such, that he feels, come what may, he must fall prostrate at her feet, confess his passion, and plead for mercy ; at others, the whole man within him rises with a sort of indignant resentment at himself and at her, when he thinks that a heart such as his has been offered to a woman, and offered to that woman in vain.

Sometimes,—but this was a rare indulgence,—but to-day, he knew not why, the thought would at intervals get possession of him,—sometimes he pictured her as his own—as loving and beloved, fostered, protected, warned, instructed, and repaying his care by something of that tender mingling of esteem and of affection with which she had blest and rewarded her father. More than that he never dared hope for. At other moments, abandoned to his despair, he almost writhed with agony, at the persuasion that she loved and would belong to another.

He had repressed his feelings, he had strug-

gled with himself, and had, as he thought, mastered the passion which so tortured him.

In this persuasion he had ventured to leave London, but as he approached the spot where she lived, as the meeting drew nearer and nearer, it was as if the tumultuous tide, so long forced back, had returned in all its strength—as if at this summons from his sister, at this assurance that he was about to meet Lilla again—the defences so courageously maintained had at once given way, and the waters, rushing back in one overwhelming flood, had rendered vain every attempt at resistance.

The nearer he approached the place, the more his agitation increased. The sweet influences of nature which surrounded him, as through the lovely forest glades he rode, crossing by a shorter way to his sister's house—the deep shadows that fell upon the grass—the beauteous sky over head—the green depths of that romantic wilderness—the sound of the light summer wind, as it rose and fell among the leafy boughs of the old elms—the

sweet perfumes of vegetable life—the soothing hum of insects in the secluded glades—all seemed to enter his soul with a strange power, softening his courage without cheering his spirits—telling of a bliss which he was never to taste, of a higher life into which he was never to enter.

Every step he took, now he had entered upon these secluded paths, and left the busy haunts of men behind him—he seemed to lose something of his inexorable pride—something of the harsh determination of his character ; but every step he felt weakened as well as melted,—and his iron nerves gave way to a strange nervous agitation:—a new feeling, indeed, to him. His heart beat fast—the pulses of his temples began to throb with a strange trepidation, as he saw the tall lines of the avenue which led to his sister's house, towering behind the bushes and groups of trees which surrounded him.

He stopped his horse. He tried to recover breath and composure—but it would not be.

He was then once more near her. In a few

moments he should see her again! Oh, bliss so long desired!—bliss which, in his stern stoicism, he had denied himself so long!—This happiness, at least, nothing could deprive him of—of this, nothing could rob him now.—He must see her. That strange, long-forbidden, but most exquisite joy, would be his once more. He should see Lilla Fleming once more.

He was at last so entirely absorbed by this agitating sense of happiness, that he seemed to have forgotten how many circumstances might have occurred since they met, to poison every particle of enjoyment.

By the time he had entered the stable-yard by the usual gate, Mr. Craiglethorpe was incapable of any thought or feeling but that one—he was about to see her he loved again.

He asked no questions this time, as a groom approached to take his horse—no questions—but flinging his bridle to the man, took a short back way, which, leading through a corner of the shrubbery, brought him to a private garden door, and thus entered the house without having been seen or announced by any one.

He walked straight down a side passage, and through the hall; and, without stopping even to take off his hat, laid his trembling hand upon the lock of the sitting-room door. It opened, and there he was.

His face flushed, his limbs trembling, and his restless eye in a hurried manner making the circuit of the room.

A face and figure such as his was not made to express extreme nervous agitation in a particularly becoming manner; and constituted for resistance, and strength, in its weakness it was ungraceful, almost contemptible.

His air was more than usually ungainly—awkward—almost ridiculous—whilst his heart was beating with that tenderness, that passion, which gives to happier countenances so much interest and expression.

But the sight which met his eyes as he entered the room effectually put a stop to all the gentler emotions. The hurrying currents rushed upon his heart, and the flush upon his cheek was succeeded by a deadly paleness.

The two lovers—for professed lovers they

may now be considered,—were sitting, side by side, upon a little sofa, placed within a window seat at the other end of the room; and Mr. Craiglethorpe, dazzled and bewildered as was his vision, saw that Valentine was holding Lilla's hand in his.

The room was large, and the windows, lofty and narrow, sprang from the floor to the ceiling; the curtains fell in rich folds from the cornices; fine gilding, flowers, paintings, adorned it; and the green shadows from the large trees, in all their wealth of summer foliage, were cast by the now declining sun, beaming in his glory behind them.

It was as some beautiful temple, to enshrine so much love: within it sat those two.

He saw nothing else.

His sister sat there, at some little distance, busied with her everlasting embroidery-frame, but he heeded not her,—he, indeed, did not see her.

He went straight up to *them*.

He went headlong up to them,—rashly,—without pause or hesitation,—in a strange,

hasty, hurried manner,—straight up to them ; and Valentine's experienced eye at once detected how matters stood with Mr. Craiglethorpe.

First, he did not know whether to like it or not ; then the handsome young fellow laughed.—A secret laugh it was of conscious triumph.—The triumph of youth, and gaiety, and beauty, over years, and ugliness, and severity,—a blooming flower beside the withered stem. The laugh,—when men, in that dry and withered stem, think they detect the passion which only befits the flower.

So laughed Valentine, in the haughtiness of his heart, as he rose from his place, and with one of his polite salutations—his bright, curling hair waving charmingly over his brow, bowed, and with his pleasant, but now rather conscious smile, offered his place by Miss Fleming to her guardian.

He looked only at the guardian, not at Miss Fleming. Had he looked at her he might, perhaps, have seen something which would have abated his self-exultation. Had he attended to her, he might have caught a slight,

agitated exclamation of surprise, and have seen a hand hastily held out, and then as hastily withdrawn. He might have marked the colour change,—a glow over face and bosom, then a paleness: but the whole was but the affair of a few seconds; in the next Mrs. Selwyn had joined the group, and was somewhat noisily welcoming her brother, and exclaiming upon the length of time that he had kept away.

For once, the rapid revulsions of his feeling were too much for the strong man's self-possession.

For the first time in his life this happened, and he was completely overset by it. He had so complete a habit of undeviating self-command, that when it was once shaken, he seemed to be left utterly defenceless against the tide of imperious passion which was now rushing in.

He behaved oddly and ridiculously,—he felt that he was behaving oddly and ridiculously, and this only increased his confusion.

Lilla gazed at him, wondering, but silent; Valentine smiled. Mrs. Selwyn made a fuss,—the best thing she could have done to cover

her brother's embarrassment,—yet it helped him little.

He stammered, he coloured,—he turned pale; he sought, and he rejected, the offered civilities. He was beside himself,—he knew not what he said or did. It was as if an incubus lay there; he was conscious of but one oppressive thought,—there she was, and Valentine was at her side.

Little did she suspect the cause of this agitation,—to her it was utterly incomprehensible. Could she have divined what was passing in his breast it might not yet have been too late,—an explanation might have restored them to each other; but she had not a suspicion of it,—she misunderstood him, and he totally and entirely miscomprehended her.

She was very much agitated, though she strove hard to conceal it. Sudden recollections rushed into her mind as he thus unexpectedly stood before her. She was vexed with herself for the emotions she felt; hurt, for Valentine's sake, at discovering the power

Mr. Craiglethorpe still possessed over her feelings. She thought it an affront to Valentine to be thus agitated by another.

It was not wonderful that she mistook Mr. Craiglethorpe's feelings as much as ever. He had rejected her offered hand—he had hardly spoken to her. Was it possible that he could be still offended? But whether he were or not, that did not matter now.

He would not take the place by her side which Valentine had offered. The young man, however, continued standing, leaning against the side of the window, and the little, contemptuous smile still upon his lip.

Miss Fleming felt more uncomfortable every moment. The window stood most temptingly open; she could not resist the relief it offered. She rose and walked out, and Valentine immediately followed her. And so vanished the sun from the horizon, and a cloud as of thick darkness fell over the unhappy man thus left. In vain his sister plied him with her exclamations and her questions; a sullen Yes or No was all that he could or would vouchsafe in

reply. His thoughts were wandering in that garden—his eyes fixed upon the spot where those two fair creatures had disappeared.

And now it is between eight and nine o'clock upon the evening of that same day.

A warm, soft summer's evening it is ; and the windows still stand open, and the drawing-room is again empty, except for one figure sitting gloomily in the corner of the sofa, buried in painful thought. Such a day as he had passed !

How had he ever brought himself to go through it? Such tortures as he had endured! Such paroxysms of pride, envy, jealousy, rage, and despair !

Such a struggle to hide his sufferings, to maintain his usual stern composure—and how vain ! He knew this ; he was conscious how unaccountable his manners had been. He had been rough, impatient, capricious, and was

tortured with all those feelings of mortification that arise from the consciousness of having failed in the attempt to act according to our notions of the becoming and the right, and of having been absurd and ridiculous.

To sit there longer soon became insupportable. He was alone ; everybody had left him and had gone out. Where were they all gone to ? Their presence irritated him to an unbearable degree, yet their absence seemed more unbearable still. Absent and forgotten!—Oh ! that was worse than all.

He rose, took a hasty turn or two about the room, and then he also, taking advantage of the window which stood wide open, sought the refreshment of the cool evening air amidst the shrubberies of the garden.

The stars were gleaming brightly this fine summer night ; the air was heavy with a softly falling dew. The night owl making its lulling hum in an oak-tree near, was the only sound to be heard—everything so still and so beautiful. Those ever-watchful eyes sparkling above him—telling him, if he could have

listened to the celestial voices—of better worlds—of better feelings—of purer affections than the wild, extravagant passions of this distracted earth ! But, alas ! for him who has never been awakened to the voices from above—whose ear has never been opened to that still harmony, and to whom nature speaks as to the dead !

He wandered, restless and miserable, along.

The garden was a treacherous sort of garden. Being arranged with much art, so as to give the impression of its occupying a much larger space than it really did, and, as often happens in gardens of this description near London, the modern taste in landscape gardening was, perhaps, not unpleasantly, mingled with the relics of a more ancient school. For not only were the walks serpentine, intricate, and winding, but trimmed hedges, and *berceaux* of yew or privet separated them in many places from each other ; these hedges being, though

impervious to the eye, not so to the ear ; thus people were rather dangerously led into an idea of the walks being much more secluded than they really were.

Such treacherous garden hedge-work—these thick, and except to the ear, impervious barriers, often play an important part in old stories : as in the instance now before us.

There had been one of the above-mentioned old fashioned yew-hedged walks left in Mrs. Selwyn's garden, but it happened not to be a straight walk, for it was in fact the remnant of what once had been a labyrinth. The paths turned and twisted about in an intricate and fantastical manner, winding round and round each other ; separated by the yew hedge, which great age and constant clipping had rendered as impervious to the eye as a stone wall,—so that whilst following the mazes of these walks, it was impossible to understand the plan upon which they were laid down, or to discover whither they would exactly lead.

The hedge, moreover, being so excessively thick, admitted of a species of niches, being

from time to time cut in it, in which niches benches had been placed, forming pleasant and shady seats, looking very retired from the impenetrable thickness of the hedges, and being so, in fact, for very few people visited this somewhat dismal part of the grounds.

The lovers were fond of this place.

Its quiet seclusion was most acceptable in a garden rather too much exposed to the eye of day, and rather too well stocked with troublesome gardeners and their boys. Besides, in midsummer heat, its darkness and tender gloom was a pleasing contrast to the glare of more sunshiny walks and grass plots,—and at all hours its solemn stillness harmonised with the mood of those who were beginning to become seriously attached to each other.

They two had wandered there this evening, and, placed upon one of the benches, they were talking together.

Quite unconscious of this, the present humour of Mr. Craiglethorpe had led him to wander towards the same spot. He soon became involved in the mazes of the labyrinth,

a sudden turn of which brought him just upon the walk on the other side of that portion of the hedge under which the two young people were sitting.

Moody and occupied with his own painful feelings, he walked slowly on, inattentive to the murmur of voices, and the merry laugh which might from time to time have been heard, But as he advanced nearer, his attention was aroused,—he heard his own name.

He stopped—hesitated whether to go on or to go back; and whilst he hesitated, the proverb was verified—unhappily for them all.

“I would not have missed the sight for the universe—it was *impayable*. Oh that Farren had been there to take a new lesson! It was too good to be wasted upon me—that ineffable air with which he came up! Mr. Craiglethorpe! What a name!—what a scraggy break-tooth name!—All bone, all crack, like a skeleton, and so happily adapted! Then his inimitable bow—was it a bow, or what was it? And then to see such an old dried piece of

antiquity, blushing and stammering like a school-boy”

She laughed—a saucy sort of laugh, and said:—

“If he has the manners of a school-boy, it is all of the boy that is left in him.”

“Boy! He never was,—he never could have been a boy,—there is nothing of the heart that was once a boy’s, in him. I’ll be sworn he has not one atom of the warmth, the fervor, the natural touch which belong to the man who has once been a boy. If you were to dissect that old withered body of his, you would find a heart no bigger than a hazel nut, take my word for it. Not a pulse within it, except indeed Oh, Lilla! I beg pardon of your charms, except, indeed, as I shrewdly suspect, the old ninny should chance to be in love.”

“In love!” said she scornfully; “I should like to see Mr. Craiglethorpe in love.”

“It would not be particularly in character with his face to be sure, and yet, do you know, Lilla, I think the queer creature—Oh, Cupid! what a mischievous urchin thou art—has

felt,—” and he laughed aloud,—“has really,—Oh, Lilla, Lilla! what business had you to expend the darts from those eyes upon such a hopeless subject.”

“The darts from my eyes,—what nonsense you talk! Believe me, Mr. Craiglethorpe is as utterly incapable of feeling a generous passion as he is incompetent to inspire it.”

She spoke bitterly as she felt upon the subject.

“May be so,—I don’t know, and most sure I do not care. I believe and feel, that no one could resist you, not even he. But, Lilla, did you see him at dinner? So majestically sullen, so grandly sulky, so magnificently above rendering the slightest attention to any one—more especially to me. Oh, nothing but the ecstatic sentiment could thus elevate a man above himself, and above propriety. You know how a generous passion lifts a man above himself,—above all baser things. Oh, that dish of green pease!—To which he would *not* help you, in spite of all Mrs. Selwyn could do.—Ha! ha! ha!”

“ Ha! ha! ha!”— He heard her laugh in reply.

“ You may take my word for it ; there was the dignity of a slighted love in all this.— Green pease!— Forbid it heaven!— Green pease to a woman who loved another.— I beg pardon,—*liked* another, I should say, a little better than himself,—rather perish first.—Grand! wasn’t it ?”

She laughed again.

Whatever the impertinent coxcomb chose to amuse himself with, she laughed at. She was not only content to see his appearance turned into ridicule by an empty fool ; but she did more,—his heart, his faithful earnest heart, his passion, his fervent invincible passion, that was made the subject of that coxcomb’s light mockery, and still she laughed !

A few more of sentences such as these followed, but their light and pointed ridicule I despair to represent ; for I perceive how little the few which I have retained, do justice to the manner in which Valentine showed up the man whom he disliked, as a man in love dis-

likes even the least formidable rival. A few more laughs from Lilla, who, piqued and alienated, took pleasure in hearing him depreciated upon whom so much thought and feeling had been thrown away—

A few more such sentences, such laughs, were listened to—and then, the deeply offended man turned away.—

He had had enough—He had received his quietus.

The passion he had once felt could not be conquered, but from that time it changed its character.

She had listened, and with evident amusement, to the discourse which was making him ridiculous; not only personally, but in his ill-starred passion for herself. She had laughed—she had enjoyed it—she had added a sentence or two of bitter sarcasm to the light satire of the other. He saw the light in which he was considered—saw it with all the aggravation which such circumstances tend to produce.

He might have been disliked—he was

churlish and unamiable—he knew that, and he cared little about it—to be hated would have been slight. But he was despised, held cheap, laughed at,—he, and his mad, but unutterable love.

It was enough.

He turned away, went quickly out of the garden, took his horse, and rode straight to town.

He resolved never to see Miss Fleming again.

CHAPTER IV.

Craignez, seigneur, craignez que le ciel rigoureux
Ne vous hâisse assez pour exaucer vos vœux.
Souvent dans sa colère il reçoit nos victimes,
Ses présents sont souvent la peine de nos crimes.

RACINE.

THIS desertion persuaded the inexperienced Lilla, as such a desertion has persuaded many a girl before her, of the utter indifference of the man, who had thus abandoned her to the pursuit of another.

She was ignorant alike of the exaggerations of jealousy and pride.

In spite of Valentine's gay assertions, she did not in the least believe that Mr. Craiglethorpe cared for her. All his conduct she explained in another way—she attributed to the offence

she had given, and to the dislike he had taken to her, this complete avoidance and utter carelessness as to her fate.

Partly in resentment at this conduct, but more because her good and grateful heart was filled with tenderness, by the strong contrast between the harshness and unkindness of the one, and the fond devotion of the other, she gave herself up to this fresh sentiment every day more and more ; as if she sought in these gentler emotions a relief from the pain and disappointment which she had experienced.

Yet, after all, in this case as in many others, the heart decided justly : the weaker attachment was to the really inferior being. The natural instinct of Miss Fleming had doubtless pointed as to where the real superiority lay : and this new attachment, though it gradually superseded the first, never fully satisfied and filled her heart—not, at least, as the other might have done—had done.

However, in due course of time, Valentine Daubeney made his proposals in form and was accepted. Which events were duly by

Mrs. Selwyn reported to Mr. Craiglethorpe, the intelligence eliciting from him neither remark nor remonstrance.

It might have been about four weeks after that fatal occurrence in the labyrinth, that Mr. Craiglethorpe, who had resumed all his ancient habits of business and society, and who again dined out—as had once been his custom—almost every day, among his old friends and croneys, — was present at a conversation which, trivial as it might appear, exercised a powerful influence over the course of his internal life ; even though it led not to the slightest deviation from the course of action he had resolved to adopt.

It was *because* it led to no deviation from the course of action which he, in the inveteracy of his deep resentment, had determined upon, that this very conversation laid the foundation for that remorse which, though it had so long slumbered, had never entirely died away,

and which late events had awakened to a new strength,—Remorse! for duties omitted which, as later years disclose the fatal consequences of the omission, almost equals in bitterness that which arises from recollection of the evil we have actually done!

His heart and conscience—those faithful recorders of the past—now, after the lapse of thirty years, recalled to him with a cruel intensity the very words of the following conversation, and the almost malignant satisfaction with which he had listened to it.

“ . . . Have you any idea of casting your eyes upon that estate near Ringwood? It is large—has been well managed—the farms and buildings, as I am told, all tight and right.”

“No; I heard it was as good as gone. That old Daubeney was about it; and I am not quite in trim to go into the market against old Fortunatus.”

“Fortunatus, you say?”

“To be sure I do: every thing answers that old fellow takes in hand. His last speculation alone, I have heard, brought him in two

hundred per cent. ; and he's a prudent old fellow—quiet as a church-mouse. He and his old woman, as he calls her, spend next to nothing. He could buy us all out if he chose. No—no use bothering myself about a property that Daubeney has set his mind upon—it may be considered as good as gone.”

“I heard yesterday that he had withdrawn from the treaty about this property.”

“How so ?—then I am not for it either. There could be but one reason for Daubeney withdrawing from the treaty, as you style it—that he found, upon inquiry, something amiss.—The fault must be in the property, or in the title—all not sound, as it professed to be.”

“Nothing of the sort, I assure you. It's a fine property, as I happen to know. There may be other reasons why Daubeney stands back.”

“What can you mean ?—Other reasons ! What can be the matter ? Why, no house stands more high in the opinion of the whole City, than Daubeney's—one into which the

river pours in, and from which the rivulet only pours out."

"Flood-gates may be opened, and the river—as you call it—run all the wrong way."

"What do you imply—mistaken speculation? Daubeney is a sound and cautious, far-seeing man, if ever such there were."

"Granted in all respects but one—Daubeney has a son."

"Yes, a pretty fellow enough—He was pointed out to me the other day. Just come home from abroad—An extremely pretty fellow."

"So his father and mother think."

"So everybody thinks. I never heard anyone say a word against the lad."

"Wait a little while, and you may have that satisfaction, perhaps."

"Satisfaction!—I should be heartily grieved if any mishap befel Daubeney in that quarter—His soul is wrapt up in the lad."

"Precisely. He imitates Jacob—but does not take advice from Solomon."

"I don't go with you."

“That old king has several mighty stringent sentences upon the necessity of training up children in the way they should go, and wholesomely correcting them betimes. Now, as for wholesome correction, I take it the word was never named, and the thing never thought of, in old Daubeney’s family. The lad was a sort of child of their old age, and neither father nor mother ever thought of denying him anything. And, as for training him up in the way that he should go—a certain progress in arithmetic may be made upon Newmarket Heath, to be sure ; but not exactly such a one as prepares a man for the counting-house.”

“Newmarket Heath!—You mean the youth was sent to Cambridge. Not the very wisest measure in the world, perhaps, for a boy who is to be brought up to business. But as for Newmarket Heath!—I never heard that young Daubeney was more there than many other young Cantabs who have turned out steady enough in the long run.”

“No!—Valentine is not quite like your many other young Cantabs, then. However,

he made very fine acquaintance there, and continues to circulate in a class quite above his father's pretensions, as the world says—and that, now-a-days is reckoned, you know, a sufficient compensation for anything.”

“I believe he does. He is acceptable wherever he goes. Young aristocrats are not so haughty and exclusive now as they were in our fathers' time. Where they meet with a handsome, intelligent young fellow, with cash enough to meet certain expenses, it's all one where he comes from. They trouble themselves little about his pedigree.—So far it is as it should be.”

“The consequences are not always as they should be. Young aristocrats are like other classes of men—they have their good and their bad among them. The misfortune of it is, that both fathers and sons who are *not* aristocrats, are too apt in favour of the distinction in rank—to forget to make distinctions among those who hold that rank.”

“But I hope young Daubeney has got into a good set.”

“An excellent set as regards rank. He’s hail fellow well met with sons of marquises and grandsons of dukes.”

“Well, this in itself is a sort of warrant of merit — when these barriers and differences have been overlooked in favour of a man.”

“Unquestionably a warrant of some species of merit or other. The question is *what* species.”

“But we were talking of this estate near Ringwood. It really would suit me excellently well. And so you think old Daubeney has abandoned the idea of purchasing it?”

“I am sure he has.”

“It seems rude enough to doubt after your assertion; but the subject is really important to me. What I want to ascertain is, why Daubeney gave up the estate. Whether because he found it, upon examination, objectionable in itself, or whether it really is, as you just now hinted, because he does not find it convenient, at this moment, to become a purchaser.

“Really, it is as I just now hinted; and I can satisfy you. . . .”

Here the speaker dropped his voice ; but Mr. Craiglethorpe, who possessed to an eminent degree the gift of hearing distinctly any speaker to whom he directed his attention, —even amid the confusion of sounds proper to a large company, lost not a word.

“I happen to know from unquestionable authority, that within a week or two Daubeney the elder has had a very large and unexpected call upon him. His son, whose inclination for Newmarket has survived his university campaigns, and whose acquaintance among lords and dukes makes him quite at home there, as well as in every other place of dissipation frequented by the great world,—has, I understand, been betting enormously upon the horse of one of his noble friends ; and has lost a sum of money important even to such a wealthy man as Daubeney. The whole affair has been hushed up, and the money immediately paid ; for the young fellow is desperately in love with a pretty girl—with not much money herself, by the by—and he was half distracted lest the news should come to her ear, or to

that of any of her friends, and so the match be broken off. Old Daubeney and his wife, good souls, are most anxious for this marriage, thinking it will "settle him,"—as if a fellow such as that was to be *settled* by anything short of personal discipline and disappointment."

"We look at life from different sides, you and I, Wilmot. If the young man be really attached to a fine, sensible girl, marriage may be the best thing that could happen to him."

"Fine!—Sensible! I hear she's as beautiful as an angel; but I have lived long enough to know how long the reign of 'as beautiful as an angel' lasts in wedlock."

This was answered by a shake of the head, and a "Well, well, let us hope for the best."

"By all means, as we have neither the power nor the call to prepare against the worst."

And so the conversation ended.

And so Mr. Craiglethorpe entered into the most grievous temptation of his life.

He was avenged—yes—circumstances had

avenged him—circumstances would teach the girl who had slighted him, the value of the man for whom he had been sacrificed.

There was a sense of deep, sullen satisfaction—that was the first feeling.

The second was—that he must do his duty.

And his duty was plain—to warn her—to interfere—if necessary, to prevent her,—and it must be done.

Ay, duty must be done. But how shall he set about doing that duty?

Earnestly, fervently, lovingly—with a deep, anxious desire to effect its purpose, and rescue a fellow-creature from destruction.

Or coldly, indifferently, unkindly — Just enough to satisfy the *selfish* conscience, which must be satisfied—to keep a man from his own self-reproaches,—but with none of the warm benevolence which, in its ardour for the good of others, forgets almost the consideration of personal duty.

How many of us, alas!—How many in the tenderer relations of life, are contented with this mutilated, this imperfect performance and satisfaction of duty!

He had nursed his resentful pride—his implacable, unforgiving anger, against a heedless and unthinking girl, of whose finer qualities he was yet unaware and unobservant. How shall he then at once return to that loving, disinterested, earnest desire for her welfare, which would lead him to the effort to rescue her from a dangerous connection, by combatting her own affections, and the resistless charms of his rival?—How shall he find generosity enough to expose himself, for her sake, to the most mortifying suspicions as to his motives, and return her preference of a worthless young man by saving her from herself and him. How nerve himself to strenuous, painful, unremitting exertions in the task—an ungrateful task at the best.

He was quite incapable of any such effort.

He had indulged his evil propensities till he had forfeited his moral power.

We cannot go on, from day to day, in the indulgence of evil dispositions, and then become generous and good at once.

It is true he was not bad enough wholly to abandon her to her fate. His conscience was not darkened enough for that; but he was quite incapable of doing what he ought to have done faithfully.

He was able to satisfy himself that all that could be reasonably required of him was, to lay the truth of the case before her, and then leave her; to please herself.

How many of us every day content ourselves with this heartless, half-and-half discharge of our obligations.

And this was literally what he did; and all that he did.

He would not even write to Miss Fleming herself—he would not overcome his disinclination to appear in the business even so far as this.

Accordingly Mr. Craiglethorpe did content himself with writing upon the subject to his sister, and simply relating what he had heard. He took no pains to verify the story, which, indeed, he implicitly believed, but which she, prejudiced as she was in Valentine Daubeney's

favour, upon such evidence positively refused to credit.

He concluded as a matter of course that his intelligence would be communicated to Miss Fleming; so he took no further pains to insure that it should—He did not even take the trouble to ascertain the fact.

It never was communicated. Not even one warning hint given.

Mrs. Selwyn *did*, however, think it her duty to go so far as to question Valentine upon the subject. He coloured and laughed, and said it was a very ill-natured, idle report. That he had been, it was true, rather unlucky upon the turf lately, but nothing to the amount said: that his father had been excessively kind upon the occasion, and all his debts were paid. He ended by vowing that he had abjured the turf for ever.

It was she who volunteered the suggestion, this being the case, that it would be useless to trouble Lilla with the story. A suggestion he eagerly caught at, assuring her that she was

perfectly right, and that she might rest assured that he would never make a bet, or touch a card again.

Touch a card!

It dropped out inadvertently. Mrs. Selwyn was not very quick of perception. She overlooked all, everything those three words might have implied—She only thought about the turf, her brother's letter spoke only of the turf. The explanation Valentine had given, had quite satisfied her as to that.

It was easy enough to persuade herself that what he passed over with one of his laughs so slightly, as a mere trifle, was a mere trifle. She, of course, implicitly relied upon his assurance, that once married, he would go upon the turf no more.

A short time only passed after this before the marriage took place.—Time halts with lovers. When the feelings are highly excited, when every fresh quarter of an hour brings its change in the visionary history of highly-wrought sentiment, how long is time! How

filled the retrospect—how slow the passage. It is as if the history of a life were compressed into a few brief pages. Every sentiment within has been changed in a few short weeks—they appear as so many years!

Had Lilla been told the evening she went to that ball, her whole heart occupied by another, that in less than two months she should be engaged to, in less than three months married, to Valentine Daubeney, it would have been impossible for her to have believed it. Yet when the event really took place, she was like others before her, and as many will be after her—quite unheeding of the very short space of time which had elapsed since she had first known him; or of the consequent impossibility of her having formed any very just estimate of the character of the man to whom she was about to devote her life.

Mr. Craiglethorpe's persevering avoidance, the indifference, the heartless indifference, as she thought it, to her concerns which he had showed, had deeply offended her and com-

pleted their alienation. The unkindness of one naturally rendered the devotion of another more precious. She loved Valentine the more, because she had loved Mr. Craiglethorpe in vain.

CHAPTER V.

Elle vous paraît fausse et pleine d'artifice;
Phèdre au fond de son cœur me rend plus de justice.
RACINE.

MR. CRAIGLETHORPE, after having thus performed his duty according to his estimate of what his duty demanded, by warning his sister, and through her, as he supposed, Miss Fleming, as to the true nature of Valentine's habits and character, abstained from visiting at the Villa altogether.

He did not appear there again, until one morning he received a letter from his sister.

Mrs. Selwyn to Mr. Craiglethorpe.

“Dear Brother,

“You never come to see us—I can’t think what’s come to you. Every day I have been expecting you down in vain, but now positively come you must—Valentine Daubeney and dear Lilla are engaged. I don’t know whether you will be as much pleased at this intelligence as I am, I rather fancy not, for you seem to me all along to have taken up, what you must allow me to call, quite an unreasonable prejudice against this fine young man—Very unreasonable, I am persuaded, as was proved to me by one thing, that foolish Newmarket story—Such an exaggeration and such a fuss. Young men will be young men, we all know; and Valentine quite explained to my satisfaction everything in the story that was disagreeable; and, in short, he assured me, that once married he should have done with the turf for ever. As for Lilla, she is excessively attached to him, and has been so from the first, (as what girl could

help being so ?) I once said something about your not having quite such a high opinion of Valentine as she and I had ; but she answered me in a way, I must confess, brother, which showed me plain enough that she looked upon your opinion in such matters as of as little value as hers would be about the price of stocks. And indeed, excuse me, but that is natural enough both in her and me, for you know you only frequent a certain set, and how should you know anything of the ways of the fashionable world, and to that sphere, and not to yours, Valentine Daubeney belongs. But I think as her guardian, it would be only decent of you to come down and meet the future husband of your ward at dinner, which mind, you have only once done—*why*, I cannot conceive. You had taken quite a fit of coming here at one time, and I was so glad to see you. . . . But you have resumed your old bachelor ways, and the more the pity. However, come down and dine here to-morrow, for we must have a talk about settlements and plans. . . .”

How much of this letter he read I know not, he did not always feel bound to read all Mrs. Selwyn's letters. At the second sentence it seemed as if a sharp dagger had been struck through his heart, and he turned sick and pale.

It was over. She was lost.

In defiance of his advice,—in contempt of his opinion,—she had given herself away to the man whom she knew he had such great reason to distrust,—the man, the very last, he would have approved.

She had not condescended even to consult him,—to listen to his reasons for the disapprobation he felt—(but which he forgot that he had never, after all, clearly expressed). She had neglected and despised his warnings, and in these few weeks—the time seemed as short to him as it appeared long to them—had sealed her own fate and his.—Sealed it in wilful disregard of what she must know he considered so serious an objection, as this Newmarket story.

She had not even had so much respect for

his judgment as to ask for explanation or advice. She despised his counsel as much as she disliked his person and contemned his love.

Every circumstance, as it occurred, only rendered the bitterness of his feelings the more intense ; everything thus viewed in the distorted light of his jealousy and pride.

But she was lost ; too true,—she was lost for ever. And the anguish of that thought it was,—the cruel pain which he endured,—which, far from quelling, seemed to rouse into fresh life those vindictive passions to which he had suffered himself to become a prey.

Love disappointed, in a heart like this, is very apt to assume a form of actual cruelty. Even when happy, in a disposition of this nature, it is too often jealous and unkind,—disappointed, it is barbarous.

That he must go down, however, to the Forest seemed so manifestly necessary and proper ; to refuse his sister's invitation would appear so extraordinary, and so offensive to

all decency ; to say nothing of the revival of those suspicions to which he might expose him, that go he felt it necessary to do. At the appointed hour, therefore, he again mounted his horse, and again a prey to distracted feelings, rode down to his sister's house.

The sensations of a man disappointed in the object of his passion, and about to meet the rival who has robbed him of his heart's treasure, are, perhaps, in every case, among the most cruel that human nature has to experience.

In the cool calculation of a stander-by,—for the moment, at least, free from such influences,—the agonies of love must often appear exaggerated and unreal ; they never, perhaps, in any case, excite the sympathy which their intensity demands. Almost all are more or less pitiless to such sufferings,—almost all, perhaps, look down, with a secret contempt, upon a man, so resolved of temper, so stern, so determined, as Mr. Craiglethorpe,

thus moved to the extravagance of suffering by the loss of what is, to a looker-on, but one pretty girl among many, after all.

But we forget all that this love represented.

It comprised everything that was ideal in his character.—All that portion of himself,—imagination, love of the beautiful,—tenderness, affection, sentiment,—everything that belonged to the infinite within, the true and higher life of man upon this earth—all had been awakened where it had never before been awakened, by this passion. Under its influence he had been roused, as it were, to the sense of a new existence within him,—an existence alien to all the usual habits of his life; but ah, how bright! how sweet! how ennobling! in the comparison! He had felt himself a better, as well as a far, far happier man, under the influence of his love,—better and happier, without alloy, under its first influences,—and though this early vision of heavenly bliss had been so soon dissipated, it had left feelings behind which could not be forgotten.

There had been moments, even yet, when he had dreamed of being blest,—ah, how supremely blessed!—when all the mortifications of pride were forgotten, and he fancied himself at her feet, pleading his love with a truth and fervour that could not prove vain.

Though these visions, it is true, had been rare,—though anger, grief, vexation, and a vindictive sense of injury had in a great measure taken their place,—though he had abjured his love, and vowed to think of the ungrateful girl no more,—yet, ah! how different from this passionate rejection of hope or wish, was the cold, dreary certainty that the hour for hopes and wishes had for ever passed away. That she was another's. That the fatal severance had been utterly made, and that they were to be nothing to each other for ever more.

Was it any consolation now that this was only what he had resolved upon?

That he had determined to drive her from his heart, and had, in some degree, as he thought, succeeded.

Alas! how imperfectly he succeeded the anguish of the present hour might testify.

But let the anguish be what it might, one thing was certain, that with a man firm of purpose as Mr. Craiglethorpe, no agony could drive him from what he had determined to do.

Again, then, we see him entering the stable yard, again throwing his bridle to the groom, and again with a firm step and immovable countenance entering the house.

This time he was less likely to be surprised into any unbecoming exhibition of feeling than he had been before. The intensity of his sensations were such as to put him upon his guard, and he had summoned all that was man within him, to bear him through the ensuing scene in a manner consistent with what his sense of his own dignity demanded.

He came into the drawing-room as usual unannounced. Lilla was there alone.

She was sitting at a small writing-table in one of the windows, and her paper lay before her as if she had been writing; but she was

not doing so now. She sat there with her elbow resting upon the table, leaning her head upon the one hand, whilst the other listlessly played with a few flowers that stood in a glass by her side.

She seemed in deep thought.

Ah, little guessed he upon what she had, even at that very moment, been musing !

As he opened the door somewhat abruptly she started up, uttered a faint exclamation, and turning very pale, sat down upon her chair again without extending her hand.

He saw the gesture, and, as usual, misinterpreted it. With the very coldest of looks he approached the table where she was sitting, and said, with as much quiet severity as he could assume :—

“I am ignorant what my offence has been, that Miss Fleming refuses to offer me her hand.”

“Refuse to offer my hand !” was her reply ;
“I am sure it was done without thought, then. *You* never offered yours. But if we begin to talk of offences, perhaps I might ask what *I* have done ?”

“You done!—Of course you are perfect, and never can be capable of anything which can *justly* offend.”

“I don’t know what you mean by that ironical emphasis, Mr. Craiglethorpe,—that *cutting* irony, I will call it—which you love to use, and more to me than any one. You attribute more force to it, perhaps, than really belongs to it, at least I am resolved it shall be lost upon me. I never set myself up to be perfect; I never pretended to be less liable to give offence than other heedless girls of my age—but of one thing I am certain, that it is impossible for any girl to have met with a severer censor—or that any one can avoid giving offence to those who are resolved to be offended. It is possible that there may be ill-humour and undue susceptibility upon one side, as that there may be heedless security upon the other.”

“Of course, those who are wounded are always to blame. A careless indifference to giving pain holds itself excused. It is only unreasonable susceptibility, forsooth, which

can resent it. I am quite aware of that fact."

"Pain!" she repeated scornfully, "pain! People, whose feelings can be really wounded—really feel pained—in their tenderness—mind I mean, not in their pride and humour—have usually some sympathy for the sufferings of others."

"You think so?"

"Yes, I *do* think so," said she, with increasing irritation of manner; "and wherever I find the contrary, I detest the heartlessness which, because pride has been offended, and temper irritated, by some childish nonsense or other—when there was not an idea of ill-intention—can cherish unforgiveness for so long—implacable unforgiveness—against the offender." More excited as she went on, her cheek began to glow, and her eyes to sparkle. "Yes, I maintain," she cried, "there is nothing so contemptible,—nothing so utterly selfish, nothing so unmanly, in one who pretends to call himself a man, as this childish determination neither to forget nor to forgive."

“Forget! Forgive!—Childish! Children are ready enough to do both. It requires a man’s heart to receive an indelible impression.”

“An indelible impression!—of evil!—a wrong, a bad, a wicked impression! Yes, true—quite true! Only men’s hearts are capable of that. I beg the dear little children’s pardon for calling it childish. Oh! yes, it is *manly*—altogether *manly*—altogether belonging to that *man*, the study of whose life it is to prove himself a *man*! . . . A real man.—One deserving that title in its noblest acceptation, is less jealous of the display of it.”

“I understand you, Miss Fleming. There are men, no doubt, to be found, upon whom that title is bestowed in its noblest acceptation—perhaps without its having ever cost them much pains to deserve it.”

“I bestow it,” she answered, with animation, “when a man can afford to be tender, kind, and courteous, without thinking such softness an impeachment of his manhood. I refuse it when, from inherent weakness within,

he feels obliged to entrench himself behind harshness, ill-humour, and a barbarous, implacable pride."

"Barbarous!—'That word you might have spared me—for it is me you mean. You might have spared me that epithet, at least. We hardly call him barbarous who strikes upon marble."

She would not own that she was anything but marble as far as he was concerned. She answered :

"The *intention* may be barbarous."

"Scarcely, when a man knows the nature of the substance with which he has to deal."

There was a pause now—the combatants stopped, as it were, to take breath, to muster their spirits for a fresh encounter.

Then, like two creatures animated to the fight, who eye each other a moment steadily, and then rush once more to the contest, they began again, Mr. Craiglethorpe saying :

"Whatever Miss Fleming's opinion may happen to be of my *barbarity*, I give, at least,

one proof of the interest I take in her happiness by accepting my sister's invitation, and making the very unpleasant visit of to-day."

"I do not see that this is any great proof of any interest, except that which Mr. Craighthorpe takes in his own character for consistency and propriety,—things which his late behaviour may have somewhat led people to doubt."

"His late behaviour! As Miss Fleming has at last so obligingly taken upon herself the office of enlightening me as to my manifold defects, she will, perhaps, be kind enough to inform me what in my late behaviour has been incompatible with the demands of consistency or propriety."

"I leave you to decide—I am not your judge. We must owe some duty to a person—have some regard, some interest in their conduct—before we trouble ourselves to judge."

"I should feel flattered—if anything Miss Fleming might say, think, or feel, could by possibility flatter me—by that last implication. No, indeed! One whose counsel in a matter

most important to the happiness of her life is utterly disregarded, must be too insignificant in her eyes to claim her attention in any other way."

"Counsel!—What counsel have you ever condescended to give me?—I was confided to your care, and what care have you ever taken of me?—*None*.—Not,—” her eyes sparkling again with a strange defiance ;—“ Not that I want your care,—not that I would heed your counsel. Between two beings so utterly antipathetical as you and I, as there can be no sympathy there can be no counsel. Care and counsel are, in such a case, vain words!”

“ So I have always felt. That the gulph which separated us was so broad, so wide, so deep—that infinity would be exhausted in the vain hope to fill it up.”

And he looked at her with a sad despair in his gloomy eye, which she, occupied with her own indignant sense of his neglect and unkindness, did not see, or, seeing, would not have understood.

“ You say right,” she exclaimed, “ eternity

would be too brief. We ever were,—we are,—we ever shall be,—separated as are the worlds of light and darkness.”

Another pause.

Then a fresh encounter. It began by his slowly and somewhat sarcastically repeating her last sentence.

“The worlds of light and darkness!—My sister informs me, that Miss Fleming has accepted the companionship of an *angel of light*, to attend her through her world.”

“Yes! And what of that? You have nothing at least to complain of in him, sir, I suppose.”

“Oh, no, he has shown himself the very pink of good breeding and politeness, as far as I am concerned. However, I never met him but once. I think he laughs pleasantly enough, and he is, I suppose, reckoned handsome. I am no great judge of such things. And as to the rest, why both are angels in each other’s eyes, I conclude, and the faults of angels—”

“Faults!” haughtily interrupting him,—
“and what faults,—what faults has ill-nature itself to reproach Valentine with?”

“ Oh, none of course!—Failings,—little weaknesses,—mere trifles—Spots in the sun.”

“ Trifles or not trifles—spots in the sun or not, I would trouble you, sir, to have done with inuendoes—and if you have anything to say against Valentine, to speak it out as becomes a man.”

The blood flew from his proud heart to his pale face at this haughty interrogation—What an air she had taken,—what a tone was it spoken with!

“ I am, vile as you may think me, disdainfully as you choose to treat me, ready to meet that man, or any man, when he asks me to explain my words. As for Miss Fleming, I have nothing new to tell her. I come here,” he went on, speaking rapidly, for his whole soul was in commotion, “to utter my last warning,—to make one more attempt to open eyes so obstinately blinded. I come as a friend,—as her father’s friend, disdained as my warnings have been, to tell her the truth once more, and discharge my conscience.—Yes, and I will discharge my conscience.—The man you have

chosen is a worthless scoundrel.—You may tell him what I say as soon as you like, and that I am ready to repeat it, and answer for it to his face.”

He uttered this so passionately that she believed, and with apparent reason, that this outburst was merely the effect of his rage at the daring speeches to which her long hidden feelings, thus bursting forth, had incited her. Her anger at the terms he used was proportionate.

“Vile!” she cried. “Shameful! I always thought you unjust, harsh, violent, I might say brutal, Mr. Craiglethorpe—but slanderous and mean I never thought you till now. Thus behind his back! and when you are certain that I shall never repeat it to his face . . . !”

“But why not? I dare you to it—I defy you to it!”

“Why not?—Why not?—Because—because—because—do you think I would set his life—good, generous, tender, noble, and true—against yours! Him whom I admire and adore, against you, whom I despise and detest? A glorious eagle against a venomous stinging

worm. Go along, Mr. Craiglethorpe—go along—and the next time you indulge your odious humour, let it be like one of the Game. Fly in the face—not give a cowardly wound in the back.”

And finding it almost impossible to avoid bursting into a passion of tears, tears which she was resolved he should not see her shed, she hastily rose, passed him, and left the room.

And these were the last words he heard her utter.

He remained standing where she left him, in such a paroxysm of contending feelings as defies description. Her words had, indeed, dropped like poisoned venom upon his soul.

Utterly incapable of divining, in the slightest degree, the secret source of this intense bitterness—ignorant of that contradiction in her hidden feelings which irritated her, he felt them as the deepest insults.

Perhaps there is no impulse of the human heart so strong, as the intense thirst to revenge an insult.

There is something in the violence awakened

by the sense of insult more difficult to restrain than any passion of our nature.

From a young inexperienced girl like her it may be thought such things might have been forgiven. But to a great degree, and not unnaturally, Mr. Craiglethorpe associated the young man, Valentine, the lover, the betrothed—with what she said and did, and this gave an implication to her words, which enraged him far more than the words themselves.

He stood a few moments petrified, as if stiffened with his excessive rage ; then starting, he looked wildly round, as one awakened from a dream. He stared thus about him for a second or two ; then his heart seemed to fail. He dropped his head upon his breast—stole rather than walked across the floor, and like one quite broken, left the room. He stole along the back passages of the house, regained the stable-yard, mounted his horse, and rode away.

A short note received by Mrs. Selwyn that evening, accounted for his absence :—

“ After the expressions used by Miss Fleming

this morning, to one whom her father constituted her guardian, I feel that any further attempt upon my part to fulfil the task assigned me would be worse than useless. I therefore beg at once to resign the office, and should the forms of the law in any manner render it necessary that I should still act, I only desire to say, that anything I am on this account required to do or to execute, I shall be ready to do or to execute, without offering hint, remark, or remonstrance, upon any occasion whatever. Having taken a resolution to which I shall strictly adhere, never to interfere in Miss Fleming's affairs more. Believing that one to whom she has offered treatment so unworthy, can consider himself no longer worthy to be any thing but a stranger to her.

RICHARD CRAIGLETHORPE."

The following words were written inside the envelope which enclosed this paper :—

"My Dear Sister,

"Some matters of business, which I had intended to postpone until your wedding

was over, call me to Ireland. After what has passed between Miss Fleming and me, of which she will give you what account she pleases, to meet again must be as unpleasant to her as disagreeable to me. I shall therefore proceed upon my journey, and probably not see you again for the present."

Valentine laughed when he read the paper, —Ah! that ready but too charming laugh! Vowed Mr. Craiglethorpe was the greatest oddity he had ever met with, and regretted that he had taken himself away. He should have liked to have confronted him—to have studied him—he was a comedy in himself.

In secret, however, he was heartily glad that he was gone.

Whilst he was near, there did not pass a day when disagreeable questions and investigations might not arise. Now all was safe.

Valentine really loved Lilla almost to distraction. He had not a wish but to make

her happy. He felt within him all the peace and comfort which accompany good intentions, and his love for this dear creature seemed to give birth to every sort of good feeling in a heart naturally not unamiable.

He was truly most delightful during the whole remainder of the courtship, which was too short not to be excessively interesting. There was no time for feeling or fancy to languish. No time for that fatal want of excitement to be felt, the result of a mistaken system of education acting on spirits of more than ordinary vivacity, which was his bane.

He was so perfectly content, his heart and imagination so completely satisfied, whilst engaged in wandering with this lovely girl about Mrs. Selwyn's agreeable pleasure grounds, that he sincerely believed such a simple Arcadian life was exactly what he was best formed for ; and he looked back with a distaste and disgust, which he quite expected would be lasting, to those scenes of gaiety and dissipation, in which he had once taken so lively a part.

She became every day better satisfied with

her choice, with the exchange she had made from the cold severity of one man to the sweet assiduities of the other. Indeed, under the present aspect of his character, where every good quality—and Valentine had many—was called forth and enhanced by the circumstance, the feeling was not to be wondered at ; nor that she looked upon him with almost unbounded admiration ; to which admiration was added that sort of enthusiasm which a generous mind feels in behalf of one whom it imagines to have been unjustly aspersed and ill treated.

As Mr. Craiglethorpé, in the haughtiness of his resentment, had managed the matter, this was the only result he had produced.

Some of you like descriptions of gay festivities—of wedding days more especially—with all the agreeable display which one loves to see attend them ; marking in the recollection of all concerned what ought to be the brightest

day of man's earthly career with a white stone. But I have a long story to tell, and I must not linger upon these accessories.

Suffice it therefore to say, that in spite of, or rather because of, the absence of Mr. Craiglethorpe, it was a very happy day to all concerned. His absence appeared to remove from Lilla's mind a sense of uneasiness—a weight—a discomfort for which she could not account.

He was gone—she probably might never see him again. She hoped she never should see him again.

Something dark, painful, and dissatisfied was sure to arise in her mind whenever she thought this way, which all the gay smiles and the bewitching tenderness of her lover could with difficulty dispel.

But absence is the grand cure for these sort of accountable influences. Once really gone, and with no prospect of ever meeting again, each day diminished something of that internal division of feelings which had so long worried her. Each day added to the tran-

quillity of her mind, and to the security with which she looked forward to long years of peace and happiness in the society of this amiable young man, and under the protection of his worthy father and mother.

And so Lilla Fleming became the wife of Valentine Daubeney.

CHAPTER VI.

Présent, je vous fuis; absent, je vous trouve;
Dans le fond des forêts votre image me poursuit.

RACINE.

AND now, having put you in possession of the circumstances which Mrs. Benfield did not relate,—as they were what Mr. Craiglethorpe was much better acquainted with than she was, and I better than either of them, — I will proceed in her own words, which were as follows.

Mr. Craiglethorpe, after a severe struggle with himself, having mastered the emotion into which he had been betrayed, and Mrs. Ben-

field having wiped the tears which had started into her eyes at the conviction of the truth now first made evident to her, that, in spite of all the harshness and coldness of his manner, he really had loved and deeply loved Lilla Fleming';—both having recovered their composure in some degree, Mrs. Benfield being the first to speak again,—as is usually the part of the woman upon such occasions,—thus she began :

“ You left us, sir, a short time before the wedding. I do not know whether you have any curiosity, any wish to hear what happened afterwards, or whether it would pain you too much ?”

“ Never mind the pain ; tell me all you know of her. But, first, answer me again—Is she living or dead ?”

“ I believe she is dead.”

“ Go on then—I listen.”

“ Do you remember the day, sir—the last day you spent at the Ash Grove ?”

“ Yes—Why do you remind me of that ?”

“ What a sweet, mild summer-day it was !

I happened to be standing at my window, which looked into the stable-yard, when I saw you come out, in a hurry as it were, and call for your horse, in a hasty, impatient sort of manner.—Excuse me, sir, but that was not like you. You were always so civil in your ways to servants.—And when the horse was brought out, you mounted him instantly and rode quickly away. I remarked you once looked back, and then I saw your face! What a troubled face it was! I recollect being struck by it. Your countenance was usually calm and quiet; not like many I know—varying with every feeling—And yet it never gave to me, whatever it might do to others, the impression that you wanted feeling.

“You must excuse me, sir; I am become a garrulous old woman. I cannot keep always to the point. Ideas, recollections, and reflections, seem to crowd upon me when I take up this story; I cannot help giving them utterance.”

“I like it best so. Go on,” said he.

“Well, sir, I saw you ride away; and I

stood at my window watching you as long as I could see you, and listening to the noise made by your horse's hoofs upon the hard road, long after you were out of sight. Someway I felt very sorry to see you ride away so. I had been wishing you would come for a many days; but you had kept away, I suppose, upon business. And I hoped, that now you were come, something satisfactory would arise out of it—for, strange as you may think it, sir, having no particular reason for distrust, my heart would misgive me rather about young Mr. Daubeney. And there was that sense and firmness about you, sir,—excuse my saying so,—and you stood so high in every one's esteem, that people could not help clinging and looking up to you in every perplexity.

“So I remember, as I said, that I stood there watching you, with a disagreeable misgiving in my heart, and wondering why you had so hastily departed. I feared something had offended you, by that troubled look of

yours,—for you know, sir, every one was aware you were rather easily offended.”

“Lay it on,” he said; “Strike upon the raw—Never mind my feelings.”

“I do not wish to hurt you, sir. I beg your pardon. I was afraid how it would be.”

“That I should be easily offended still. Never mind if I am. Go on—what signifies giving offence to such a man as I am, now!”

“Nay, but——”

“My good Mrs. Benfield, once for all, I shall be very much obliged to you if you will go on without taking the slightest notice of anything I may do or say. If you are, as you say, somewhat incontinent of words, allow me the same privilege with respect to my exclamations. We may both be, in this respect, a little the worse for wear, and less masters of our tongues, than in the days of our strength.”

“I was standing thinking in this way, when I heard Miss Fleming’s bell, and went down to

her room. I knocked at the door; she said come in, and in I went. Her appearance surprised me.

“ She was walking up and down the room, in a strange disordered manner; her hands wrung this way before her, her face flushed, and her hair as if it had been pushed back violently from her forehead. She continued to walk up and down in this way after I had come in.

“ ‘ Give me a little sal volatile,’ said she.

“ I was a nurse, a friend, a favourite, you know, sir,—I was a privileged person,—‘ What is the matter with you, my darling?’ said I.

“ ‘ Oh, nothing,—nothing at all.—Give me some sal volatile!’

“ I went and prepared it, she keeping walking up and down the room all the while, wringing her fingers together hard, as her hands hung down before her, but with her eyes quite dry, and never uttering one sigh, though she breathed hard and almost panted.

“ I took her the glass, and as I gave it her,

said coaxingly, ‘What is the matter, love?—What has vexed you, my darling?’

“‘So cruel!—So barbarous!—So unkind!’ at last broke forth, and she burst into a passion of tears.

“I took her in my arms,—I made her sit down on my lap, as she used to do as a child. I laid her head against my bosom. She went on sobbing as if her heart would break?

“What *has* happened?”

“‘Why,—why,—what have I ever done?—Why?—His own friend’s child!—Trusted to him by my dear father,—Why does he hate me so?—How have I deserved it?—Tell me what I have done.’

“‘Done!—Nothing!—Who,—who dares to be unkind? Who can be such a monster as to vex my angel, child.—Mr. Daubeney?’

“‘Valentine!—Oh, no! He is everything that is tender, affectionate, good to me.—And I feel as it were quite ungrateful,—as if I did not, and never could love him half so much as such a heart deserves.—No, no, not Valentine, dear Valentine! My joy and comfort in this world.’

“ ‘ Well then, love, don’t cry,—Don’t vex yourself for anybody else,’ I said.

“ Not knowing exactly what I ought to say, for someway, sir, I never could quite join her in this sort of feeling about Mr. Daubeney, I was quite aware what a nice, handsome young gentleman he was; but someway I misdoubted his heart, which she seemed to prize so highly.

“ However, she was soothed, either by the thought of him, or because she had given vent to her tears, and she lay quiet a little time, with that sweet dear head of hers resting against my shoulder.

“ All of a sudden she lifted it up, and fixing her large eyes upon me with that earnest look she had at times, she said,—

“ ‘ Tell me, Benny, what I have done to make Mr. Craiglethorpe hate me ?’

“ ‘ Nothing—nothing—I am sure. Besides, what makes you think so? He doesn’t—he can’t hate you.’

“ He does—He can—and he shows in every way he can think of, that he does. And what

have I done? What have I ever done to deserve it?’

“ ‘Deserve it—that I am sure you have not. And if he is such a brute as that, I am sure if I were you I would’nt care.’

“ ‘That’s easily said,’ she answered, gently shaking her head, ‘but it is very painful to be hated;’ and then the tears came into her eyes again, and she added very softly, ‘Then you think he does hate me.’

“ ‘I saw by that she wanted to be contradicted. It was one of her wilful ways, you know, poor thing. She would use to run on and exaggerate a matter strangely, when her feelings were hurt, in order to get contradicted. You remember that little foolish bit of perverseness of hers, I dare say, sir?’

“ ‘I do not seem to have been inclined to overlook her faults, whatever they might have been,’ he answered, gloomily.

“ ‘Hate you!—No, my child, I never said, and never thought he could or did hate you. Impossible anybody could. But what I do think is that he is a cross-grained, uncomfortable old

fellow, and the less you or anybody troubles themselves about his humours, the better.'

"You said I must speak out, sir, pray forgive me."

"Yes, I wish it; go on."

"She repeated my words, raising up her head again, and looking me in the face, and her eyes recovering that sparkling look of theirs."

" 'Cross-grained, uncomfortable old fellow! Not so very old neither, Benny. You need not call him so old. He's only fifteen years older than I am, and what's that between a man and woman? And as for cross-grained and uncomfortable, all I know is, he bears with everybody but me. He's uncomfortable with nobody but me. He's so good to his sister—so civil to the very servants. Only harsh, and brutal—yes, brutal with me.'

" 'He is a brute to you, Miss Fleming, and that's the truth of it,' said I, quite in a passion with you, sir, I must own, when I thought of your grieving such a sweet creature, with your strange conduct.

“But this made things worse.

“She threw her arms round my neck, and burst out a crying again, and kept sobbing worse than ever, and saying, ‘You think he is—you know he is! And tell—tell me what have I done—what *have* I done to deserve it?’

“‘Nothing, I tell you, nothing; it’s his own strange humour. Never mind him, and I’ll tell you what, if you go on crying in that way, your eyes will be so red, and what will Mr. Valentine think? And what will you say?—That you’ve been crying because Mr. Craiglethorpe was cross to you. That will never do. Old as I called him, and old as he seems to me—for his heart is old, whatever his years may be—he’s too young for a young lady to be found crying in this way about, be he her guardian, or be he not.’

“She started up from my knee, wiped her eyes, and turned away. I saw she was the colour of scarlet.”

“‘Valentine knows me too well to care. But I should be sorry Mr. Craiglethorpe saw at dinner that I had been crying.’

“ ‘That he won’t do. So set your heart at ease upon that score ; for he’s ridden away this half hour ago.’

“ ‘Ridden away !—Gone !’

“ ‘Yes, I heard him call for his horse, and saw him ride out of the stable-yard myself.’

“ ‘Gone !—Then it is for ever !’

“ Was all she said, in a hollow tone, and she sat down upon a chair by the side of the bed, and threw her arms upon it before her, and her face upon the counterpane ; and if ever I saw the attitude of one in despair, it was hers ——

“ I beg your pardon, sir ; you are too much affected. I ought, perhaps, ——”

“ Say no more—Say no more,” shaking his head in a bitter, impatient manner—“ Oh God of Mercy !—God of Heaven !”

He crossed his arms over his breast, leant his head upon his chest, his two clenched fists covering his eyes. He seemed writhing under his misery. Regret—cruel, cruel, vain regret—was agonizing his very soul.

When he had recovered himself, and re-

sumed his usual posture, he did not repeat the impatient "Go on," for which she waited. What he said was,—

"I have heard enough of this—Please to skip the rest, and tell me about the wedding. It was a very gay affair, no doubt.

Bitterly he spoke, but she obeyed.

"No, sir. In my opinion, weddings seldom are, except among thoughtless people."

"As the day approached, I saw that Miss Fleming grew more and more thoughtful; and when she was by herself, was grave, and almost sad. She would walk up and down those shrubby walks hour after hour, in a manner I never observed her to do before your departure—then, when Valentine Daubeney would come, she would clear up. He was so gay and cheerful, nothing could resist him.

"Not Lilla Fleming, I am sure.

"I remember particularly, one day, that I had occasion to go and look for her in the garden. It was to consult her about the wedding-dress. We were all very busy at her clothes; Mrs. Selwyn and I, particularly, for we had

the ordering of them all to ourselves. Miss Fleming seemed to take no interest whatsoever in the matter. Mrs. Selwyn had it all her own way, and this she liked well enough. I think I see Miss Fleming now, walking into the room, where we were all as busy as bees; and which was quite surrounded with the pretty things which were getting ready for her—for Mrs. Selwyn took care she should have a magnificent trousseau—her head hanging upon one side;—drooping, sir, like a flower too heavy for its stem,—and something so sweet and mournful about her eyes. And Mrs. Selwyn, taking her about and showing her this thing and that, and asking her how she liked it—and crying out

“ ‘Oh! but you *will* look lovely in this dress—and, isn’t this a charming little capote—and, isn’t this a love of a cloak’—and so on.

“And she, with that soft, languid air of hers—you recollect how I mean, sir—such as she used to have, when she was not in spirits; more lovely, as I thought, at such times, than in all her gaiety.”

The listener gave a heavy sigh.

“Yes—yes—I remember—go on.”

“She, walking up and down; and, to oblige Mrs. Selwyn, taking up this lace or that trimming upon a skirt or sleeve, and looking at it, and saying, ‘It’s very nice—it’s very pretty,’—in such an indifferent tone. Or, ‘Oh, Mrs. Selwyn! you are only too good to me,’—with so much softness in her voice—but all with a listless sort of indifference. I can’t tell how it was, but not at all like a young girl that was very happy.”

“But you were going to tell me of something which occurred when you went to her in the garden.”

“Yes, sir—where was I—Oh! I forgot.—Sometimes I fancied she did not love Mr. Daubeney as she ought to do—and yet she never seemed easy but when he was there. When he came into the room, it was as if the sun came from behind a cloud.

“I remember this, one day more especially—as I said. I went to look for her in the garden by Mrs. Selwyn’s desire, to ask her

opinion of some nonsense of a trimming or other. Ah, sir! what vain trifles such things seem to me now.—She was walking slowly up and down in the little quiet bit of garden and grass-plot that lies in that nook under her own window—quite out of the way, where nobody almost goes. It was under that great plane-tree, which, if ever you were there, you may perhaps, sir, remember. Its branches hang very low, in some places sweeping the ground. And I saw her from the walk I was coming down—standing quite still, with her eyes fixed upon it. I watched her a little while, for she seemed so full of her own thoughts I hardly liked to disturb her. She stood there some time, pensively gazing, with her eyes fixed upon the tree: then she sighed heavily, and began her slow languid walk up and down again.”

Mr. Craiglethorpe’s chest and shoulders were drawn together as those of one attempting to smother a paroxysm of intense pain; but he uttered not a sound. Mrs. Benfield was so full of her subject that she did not observe him.

“When I got close up to her, I saw she had been crying. She was no great crier, if you recollect, sir; and if ever she did cry, it was in a still, silent sort of manner,—no violent heaving of the breast, no convulsion of the features. I used to think of the comparison used in books, of the fall of the soft morning dew, when I saw her weep. I really could hold no longer—a nurse you know has great privileges. So instead of talking about the trimming which I held in my hand, I said, ‘*Do* tell me, my dear, dear child, what makes you so sorrowful.’—She gathered herself up in a moment.—‘Sorrowful!—what do you mean, Benny?—*I* can have no reason to be sorrowful.’—‘If there were a reason it would not make me so anxious to see you so.’—‘So you don’t care for people who are unhappy with good cause, only for those who are sorry they don’t know why—that’s my own reasonable Benny’—she said, with one of her own mocking laughs.

“‘It’s not because there’s no reason, but because I can’t imagine the reason,’ I replied.

“ ‘ Well, then, don’t imagine the sorrow—for it must, you know, be all of your own creation. I am sure,’ she went on, ‘ I have everything upon earth to make me happy—and I should be very wilful and capricious, and wrong, if I wasn’t happy—and therefore, pray Benny, don’t suppose such a thing again, for it would be to suppose me very much to blame. Loved as I am,’ she went on, almost passionately, ‘ I should be the most ungrateful girl in the world if I wasn’t happy.’ ”

“ ‘ Ay, but, I am sorry to say, Love is not quite so reasonable, I am afraid, as all that.—Inclination will not be ruled. Many a one has loved before now—and not succeeded in making himself loved again, by the girl he adored.’ ”

“ ‘ That shan’t be the case with me,’ she said, with spirit. ‘ Those who love *me*, will *I* love.’ ”

“ ‘ Ah! *Will*.—That’s not quite the word for Love’s vocabulary. When we say we *will* Love, he knows, I am afraid, what that means

—He would much rather hear us say, we won't.'

“‘ You are too refined for me, with your wills and your wonts. You are very knowing in love matters, I must say, Mrs. Benny. But I tell you, once for all, I disclaim all such unworthy feelings—for I call all things unworthy that are beyond our own control—and I can consider nothing more unworthy—more beneath a woman’s true dignity and honest pride—than to give her heart to the man who despises it, and withhold it from the man who values it.’

“‘ Well, my dear, there is no great virtue, it must be confessed, for there can be no great difficulty in giving one’s heart to such a young gentleman as Mr. Daubeney ; and if ever man deserved return for a true passion, I believe he does.’

“‘ I think so !’ said she, shortly.

“‘ But I cannot help wishing you looked a little less sadly,’ I persisted.

“‘ Nonsense!’ said she, turning away impatiently, and making a few steps from me ;

presently she came to me again, and said very seriously,—

“ ‘ I really must beg of you, Mrs. Benfield, never to say these sort of things to me again ; they pain me. And I also beg that you will never hint such a thing to any other person. And if you should hear such a thing said by any person, which I really believe you cannot, because it is so false, pray put a stop to it at once. I would not have Valentine, after all his love, goodness, and earnest desire to make me happy, fancy for one instant, or have any other person fancy, for one instant, I was so base and ungrateful as not to be happy,—no, not for the whole wide world. Besides, I am happy,—I declare I am very, very happy.—Oh, Valentine !’

“ He came down the path as she said these last words, which he overheard.

“ ‘ Are you, my charmer ?’ he cried in rapture, ‘ Do you confess so much ? Delight of my eyes and idol of my heart !’

“ She gave him such a smile, so full of sweetness and affection, as she gave her

hand, which he seized and put under his arm.

“ ‘ Well,’ said I, ‘ its no use my staying here any longer with my trimmings I see, for there’s no chance of getting a hearing now, I suppose, from either of you !’

“ ‘ Oh, but there is !’ he cried.—‘ Trimmings !—Trimmings for her wedding clothes !—Let me see them,—let me give my opinion of them. Everything which is intended to touch even the hem of her garment, is dear and interesting to me.’

“ She smiled at this again so sweetly, and cast her eyes upon him, and his met hers—oh, with a tenderness and sweetness inexpressible !—So I displayed my trimming, and we had a long discussion upon it ; and I had the pleasure to hear her soon laughing quite merrily, and rallying and making fun with Valentine, for being so in earnest about such a trifle ; and he, laughing and rallying back again, all in such a loving way, as if he delighted in being the object of her sportive vein. You know, sir, of old, when she was in spirits, she much loved her joke.”

“Brute! fool! idiot! Insensible! peevish, brutish idiot!

Mrs. Benfield stared.

“Nay, go on; I was only talking to myself.—It’s a way of mine.”

“But, sir, the little story is done. I only related it to show the changes of humour to which she was subject. I went away, and I heard them through the trees chattering and laughing so merrily together, like two children almost, and when she came in from her walk, she looked as bright as the dawning.”

“*Varium et mutabile*,” with a slight sneer.

“Sir!”

“Only a Latin half line which I learned when I was a lad. You wouldn’t understand it if I construed it for you. Well, they were married; everybody knows that, and a gay wedding I think you said it was.”

“No, sir, I said no such thing.”

“The day before the wedding was a terrible day for me. It seemed as if a presentiment of what was to happen was given to my darling young lady; yet why and wherefore, when

it was too late to do any good? She seemed to be perfectly miserable.—So restless that she could not keep in one place a quarter of an hour together; yet more positive than ever in asserting that nothing ailed her, except being a little nervous. Oh, Mr. Craiglethorpe! Why *were* you not there?"

"Don't talk so. Don't keep harping upon that string. Don't keep bringing me in in this manner. If I had been there what good could I have done? She was only the more wilful for being contradicted. If she would not hear it from you, it was likely indeed that she would from me!"

"It was fine summer weather,—the latter end of August, and that night was one of the loveliest I almost ever beheld. The heaven was absolutely alive with stars,—a glittering, a mighty host over head. The air was soft and dewy, the flowers were giving forth a sweet smell; everything was still except a leaf dropping, or a bird flitting from a spray now and then. One seldom sees the night. It is a great loss I often think, that one's in the

house shut up at that very time when the glories of the firmament are in their full splendour. *That* night, however, I happened to be out, for I was looking for Miss Fleming. I came as usual at the proper hour to her room, to put her to bed—I didn't use to wait for her bell—but she was not there. I went into her little dressing-room,—she was not there,—to the drawing-room,—all dark. The candles were put out, and Mrs. Selwyn was gone to her own room ; but, as I was fidgetting about, wondering what had become of my pet, I chanced to see the little glass door leading to the shrubbery standing open : I felt sure she had gone out that way, and, rather uneasy, I followed her. I went hastily through the walks, and then bethinking me of the plane-tree which she was so fond of, went down the path that leads there and into the garden. I did not see her walking there. The plane-tree hung its branches so low, that they dipped to the grass, you remember ; it was not till I got to one side that I could see the trunk,—at the foot of it I saw something dark, and there she lay.

"She had dressed herself that day in a black Spanish dress, flounced with Vandykes, which were adorned with quantities of bugles. Probably, you will not remember it. Mr. Daubeney was very fond of the dress. The black dress was the reason why I hardly saw her in 'the shadow at first. She was laid there close to the trunk of the tree, her long, white arms stretched round it, as if embracing it, and her face close to the ground.

"I dared not venture to approach her. I heard her deep, low groans."

"What is this?—What is this? You are telling me a romance! It's like a foolish ballad. That's not a true story, Mrs. Benfield. What do you mean by this trifling?"

It burst forth, as if under uncontrollable agitation. She seemed to take no notice, but went on :

"I stood there a little time—then I began to grow uneasy. I went up to her, and, gently as I could, put my arm under her, and tried to raise her, saying, 'Lilla! Miss Fleming! dear child!—what ails you?'

"It was different this time. She did not repulse me impatiently—She did not spring up with sudden animation, and repel the charge hastily.

"She suffered me to raise her, as there I knelt by her side, turned her face to me, gave me one look—oh! such a look!—threw her arms round my neck, and, like a baby—ah! sweet, sweet thing! what was she after all but a baby?—burst into a flood of tears upon my bosom.

"There she lay, sobbing and crying, sobbing and crying,—and the wind seemed softly whispering words of comfort, as it rose and fell among the branches that hung over our head; through which the stars, in their beauty, shimmered and gleamed.

"Did I hold her to my heart?—did I press her, like a mother, in my arms? But, alas! alas! after all, what can the tenderest mother do for the poor dear, dear creatures in their unhappiness?"

"Well, she spoke at last—and what did she say?"

“Ah ! sir.”

And Mrs. Benfield threw a long, searching, meaning glance upon him. Presently she went on :

“She said no more this time than at other times. When she had done crying, she kissed me affectionately, called me her dear Benny, said I was very good to come out and seek her, that she was better for a good crying-fit, and would now go to bed, for the night air had refreshed her, as it always did, and she should sleep.”

CHAPTER VII.

Oh! days of Heaven, and nights of equal praise,
Serene and peaceful are those heavenly days,
When souls drawn upwards in communion sweet
Enjoy the stillness of some close retreat.

COWPER.

THE narrative ended for the present, and there was a dead pause.

Mrs. Benfield seemed to want rest, to be silent in order to gather breath before continuing her narration. The expression of her face was melancholy and grave. These recollections seemed very painful to her. As for her auditor, it is difficult to describe his countenance. Now it was troubled and irritated—now impassioned—now filled with a strange horror—horror, as if he expected some dread-

ful spectre to rise up every moment before his feet—now it was overcast with a sickly paleness, as if the beatings of his heart were failing him—anon, a flush, dark and lurid, would pass over it, as if the blood were rushing in tumults to the brain.

When Mrs. Benfield had ceased speaking, he remained sitting there. He did not look at her—he seemed absorbed in his own emotions. Once he started from his chair with an expression of wild rapture; but immediately sank back, with a look of despair unutterable.

Solemn and sad she remained, and sat there, with her eyes bent upon the table, not observing him, but occupied, on her side, with painful rumination. Her sorrow and regret were of a calmer nature than his. They had been brooded on for many long years. His were new, were fresh, were in their first agony.

“The wedding!” was the next word he uttered.

“We got through it pretty well; but neither the bride nor bridegroom was in

spirits. It was provoking. I think I never saw Miss Fleming look to so little advantage, in spite of the pains we had taken to dress her; and that seemed to vex him.

“He was at first looking so remarkably well, so handsome, and gay, and happy—it was something quite beautiful to see him, as he met her at the church-door. But she looked so ill, so agitated, and received him so coldly, that I saw he was struck quite aback, as it were.

“For the first time in my life, I saw Valentine look vexed, confounded, and out of humour. You know, sir, when people are in great joy what a turn a sudden check gives one.”

“No, I don’t—I never was in great joy in my life,” he said, moodily.

“I don’t love Mr. Daubeney much—some-way I never did—and I never wished to see the child his wife; but I *was* sorry for him just then, and quite provoked at her. I had never seen her give him such a reception before, and I did think it out of place then.

Brides are naturally nervous and hurried; but in spite of that, they manage not to look so unpleasing and disagreeable as that sweet girl, I must say, did at that moment; and I think it is the only time of my life I could say it of her."

The eyes of Mr. Craiglethorpe were again rivetted upon the speaker, with an expression of impatient interest.

"The ceremony, however, was soon over, and then they went to the vestry, and all that; and then the young couple got into their carriage, and all the other people followed.

"I went home by a short cut, and was ready at the door to see everybody get out of their carriages.

"When the two young people got out, I saw they had both been crying. He had been crying as well as she.

"Well, there's nothing like having a good cry together for making people good friends. It's like a good shower of rain that changes an east wind—all that dry, cold, freezing-up feeling dissolves like a charm before it.

“She was all softness and sweetness again, yet gently pensive and grave; that was natural, and he was, for the first time I ever saw him, thoughtful and serious. I never heard him laugh so little, or appear so little in spirits, as at his own wedding-breakfast. It looked well in her, but sat ill on him, I thought, and people remarked it too, which vexed me not a little.

“There was no crying or so on, when they went away. She had nobody she cared for to cry about; so that all went off quietly enough. I didn't go with her, I was to be housekeeper and precede her to her new home, to set things in order. The young girl, Selina, went with them on the wedding journey.

“Do you know where you at this moment are, sir?” broke out Mrs. Benfield, after another still longer pause, during which both narrator and listener, had again sat with their eyes bent upon the floor, lost in their own thoughts, and apparently forgetful of each other's presence.

“Do you know where you are at this moment, sir? Under what roof? In whose chamber? You surely must know?”

“Must know!—How should I? This house, it is plain, has been long uninhabited, and if it were not, do you suppose I keep a register of all the houses habited or uninhabited in this city? No, I neither know nor care what fool might have lived here years ago.”

“Ah, sir! that is what I supposed. Yet it seems so strange to me—such a princely house as we may call it!”

“Merchant princes go to the West End now-a-days. The proprietors of this place are probably now living in some fine house in Portman Square, or there-away.”

“Ah, sir! in Portman Square? . . . It is a dark narrow house where they are lying.”

“Well, they are dead, I suppose. A man dies every second. You dont think I am going to mourn over dead people I never knew or heard of.”

“Dear me, Mr. Craiglethorpe! Have you not the least suspicion?”

“Suspicion of what?”

“Of whom this house belonged to.”

“Not a shadow—”

But as he said this, his brow began to darken almost alarmingly ; and casting a strange wild look round the room, he suddenly started up and cried :—

“Strange that it never struck me before. I always heard they lived in a magnificent old house in an obscure corner of the city. This was this was”

“The house of old Mr. Daubeney. The place where he lived according to a fashion now long forgotten, and which he was, perhaps, the last who followed.”

“Ay—ay ! The man was a really sensible man,—I always heard that of him. He had but one folly—but that was a monster one.”

“Sir, the earth held not a more righteous, honourable, excellent man than Mr. Daubeney. He had but one failing, all the world said. But it was an only son—the last of a numerous stock, who had all died infants. The youngest

of all—the child of his old age—dear to him as the apple of his eye.”

“Poor fellow!” said Craiglethorpe in a softened tone.

Pity was awakening. Yes, late as it was, that stern heart was beginning to melt to the softer emotions. It was a new feeling with him to pity error. Throughout his life he had regarded it only as the object of the harshest censure.

“This is the place. Yes, this is the house,” Mrs. Benfield went on, “where I, having prepared every thing for the reception of the young couple at Laurel Grove, a villa near Richmond, which Mr. Valentine had taken—this is the house to which I was invited by old Mr. and Mrs. Daubeney, that I might be there to receive my dear young lady when she came from her wedding journey.”

“It was a kind thought of the old lady, was it not? But she was made up of kindness. I have heard tell of some good king or emperor, who cried out when his day had not been marked by some good deed, ‘I have lost a

day !' I verily believe Mrs. Daubeney never lost one such day.

"I had seen this worthy couple at Mrs. Selwyn's now and then, whilst the courting was going on. The old lady had taken a prodigious fancy to Miss Fleming, and she seemed ready to love everything and person that belonged to her. Such a thorough, kind, affectionate heart.

"Such a loving, attentive, devoted wife to Mr. Daubeney, she was ! Such a loving, careful, tender mother to her son,—such a mistress of a family,—such a friend to all her servants. All the virtues of the old world gone-by she had. The misfortune of it was, Mr. Craiglethorpe, as I often used to think, that the parents and the child belonged to two different worlds.

"Mr. Daubeney's world was of quite a different sort from that in which the young couple lived. He was a true representative of the ancient, honourable, British merchant. His gains were made not by enormous speculations, by a cast of the dice, as one may call it, almost,

but by the trade of exchanges, of carrying in his ships things that were wanted in one place, and bringing back in exchange things that were wanted in another. He did not deal in other men's losses ; his profits were not drawn out of other men's purses, to other men's injury. His trading was that noble trading by which every side profits. His industry and intelligence were great, and his gains were very large.

"This was the way his father, and his father's father, and his father's father's father, had dealt before him. But so it was to be no more. New fashions had set in in trade, as well as in every thing else, and Valentine belonged entirely to the new world.

"I beg your pardon for troubling you with my thoughts upon these matters, but"

"I like to hear you—I like to hear the reflections of an observing, sagacious, old woman. You will oblige me by going on just in your own way."

He was evidently relieved by this little deviation from the legitimate course of the story. He breathed more freely. His quick

intelligence was awakened, and it served as a diversion to his feelings.

“The first grievous mistake in judgment—if I may venture to give an opinion—which Mr. Daubeney made, was in sending his son to the University. He had himself been brought up at Merchant Taylors’ school, and had thence entered his father’s counting-house. He had received a good sterling trader’s education; but the world was advancing, and I believe he sometimes himself longed for something more. He was fond of books, and loved to spend his leisure in reading, and perhaps regretted that he had not received in his youth a more enlarged education. He was nearly fifty when Valentine was born: there had been strange changes in the world in that fifty years. He wished his son to adorn, by the accomplishments of a liberal education, the class to which he was destined; for it was his desire not to take him out of the society in which he himself dwelt, but to raise the tone of it,—and of him, as an influential member of it.

“But the University, in those days, was not the place exactly to answer his purpose—I hear things are different there now—and besides, never having been there himself, and living so entirely out of *that* world as he did, Mr. Daubeney was totally ignorant of the true character of the place, its real advantages, or its real dangers. He thought his son would turn out a fine scholar, and a fine gentleman—but he found to his cost that Universities every year turn out fine gentlemen, who are not fine scholars at all.

“Another disadvantage was, that he was perfectly ignorant of the money which a young man ought to be allowed to expend there. He was in danger of one or the other extreme—in his fear for his son’s morals, of allowing too little ; or in his fear of not being liberal enough, of allowing too much. He fell into the latter mistake. Valentine, I believe, had a great deal more money than was good for him ; and he wasted that and his time, as if he had an inexhaustible fund of both before him.

“ He was not like his father in his love for books. His spirits were so gay, his health so exuberant, his imagination so lively, his activity so inexhaustible, and his means so ample, that he never wanted amusement,—and it was for amusement he lived. A serious desire to cultivate or expand his mind, he was not of a sort to feel. He was the world’s favourite, as it were, already. Child—schoolboy—youth—man—everybody was willing to welcome and to love him—young and old, gay and grave, learned and ignorant ; for the lively sallies of his buoyant imagination, and never-failing good humour, his charming manners and inexhaustible spirits, made him the darling of all. Learned and scientific men—men of the highest intellectual attainments—I observed, seemed to take strange pleasure in the rest and recreation afforded by the society of this lively trifler. Nay, I could almost have fancied they felt flattered by the attentions of this young, handsome, and admired being ; and Valentine was naturally so clever, as to be quite capable of enjoying, in its turn, the

society of the wise and well-instructed. It was an amusement like the rest, and to enjoy it no previous study on his part was necessary.

“I run on——”

“You do rather. But you seem to me to have thought more, and to express yourself better, than I should have expected from one in your station of life.”

“I have had rather unusual advantages — but that is no matter.

“To this very house, sir, then, I came for the first time on the day my sweet child and Mr. Valentine were to return from their wedding journey. Ah! sir—pity—pity to see it as it is now!—It was such a fine old place then!

“The hall that you now see all covered with littering boxes and packages, and its marble pavement begrimed with dirt, was magnificent. Its lofty pillars—its painted and gilded ceiling, then in perfect repair, and yet with a certain venerable air of age about them, which rendered them only the more imposing—that fine black and white marble floor—the magni-

ficent staircase of fine chestnut, with its carved and gilded balustrades—the noble gallery—those glorious Spanish pictures with which it was hung—the gravity of the household—the sober character of the whole—the staid, matronly air of the good mistress—the simple dignity of the master—the grandeur of the whole scene,—yet all so quiet, so serious, so almost severe, amid its splendour! Ah! sir, when I entered these walls that day, I did think my dear Miss Fleming was a happy woman. I forgot all my misgivings—all my evil presentiments; I was as proud of this alliance as her poor father could have been.

“And now”—looking round piteously as she spoke—“now, to see it all gone! That edifice of their fortunes, raised by the successive industry of generations, swallowed up in the abyss of ruin—and this mansion—this noble mansion—what is it?—A warehouse for other men’s goods!

“Everybody in the City, I remember, at the time, lamented the fate of Daubeney’s house, but what, said they, could one expect

when it fell into the hands of such a hare-brained fool as his son.

“ It was not that he was a fool, sir,—he was far from it,—but that he wanted training. The greater the spirit of the young, high-bred horse, the more he needs the careful training. Valentine knew not what it was to feel the curb,—had never known what it was to submit to be checked,—never known what it was to be obliged to deny himself, to endure contradiction, or submit to duty,—he had not been taught *to do what he disliked*. And what is a man who has not learned that? He would have been the happier as well as the better for it. Life that has no seriousness, has no true happiness. We are made so that change and contrast are necessary to us. Nothing but pleasure soon makes pleasure itself tasteless.

“ Ah, that was the worst of it,—Valentine had learned only to exist upon pleasure, and every pleasure, in its turn, grew stale.”

“ What! he tired of his wife! You don’t, surely, mean that, by this last moral reflection of yours!”

“Why, sir, in a certain sense he did,—though he always loved, and was kind to her,—but he soon grew weary of home,—even though she was there.”

A ray of pleasure,—a strange pleasure,—a gleam of cheering satisfaction, shot to Mr. Craiglethorpe’s eye at this last speech. Once more a sense of his own intrinsic worth seemed to cheer him,—he seemed to understand the value of the love his heart had once been capable of bestowing,—felt and understood, what it was that Lilla missed, even in Valentine.

“But that day, when, after we had been long waiting at last the chariot and four drove into the court before the house, there was no one who could think of anything but hope and happiness.

“The carriage stopped, and the door was opened,—down fall the steps, and the young pair are out, and in the arms of their father and mother in a moment. The good old people, tears of joy in their eyes, were standing ready to receive them. It was a beautiful

sight : the son in the arms of his mother, who was crying for joy ; the sweet bride upon the breast of the old father, trembling with emotion both of them — then they exchanged, and the son was blessed by the father, and the daughter strained to the bosom of the mother. There was no constraint, no false shame,—the servants were crowding into the hall,—but it was all one. There was a patriarchal simplicity about it. Then they went up stairs in a cluster, together, and one heard Mr. Valentine's merry laugh ringing, like the voice of gladness, down the gallery."

" And how long did this prodigious happiness last? Pity anything should arise to disturb the exquisite felicity you are describing."

" Brief,—brief happiness ! What's the use of it ? What's the use of accumulating every means of enjoyment and happiness round a young couple's head, if the one thing needful

is left out. If the fear of God,—if right principles, and virtuous habits, are wanting, what is all the rest but a ‘mere vapour,’ which passeth away !

“ I am getting tired, and you, sir, are getting tired ; I will not weary myself or you by describing that happiness, which, now it is all over, it is most painful even to think upon: It did not last long ; there was a canker worm in this beautiful bud of promise. It went on increasing in size and strength, ravaging and ravaging ; at first secretly, and unperceived by any one,—afterwards openly, and its devastations quick and cruel,—till, at last, all was blighted and destroyed.

“ That worm, sir, was the fatal love of pleasure in Valentine’s character, of which I spoke to you,—perhaps I should rather say, of excitement,—for it was not so much pleasure as excitement that he craved after. These lively spirits, if not nourished by alternations of wholesome industry, which at once restrains their effervescence and exercises their strength,

seem to suffer more from dullness and weariness of life than the less volatile,—Whatever it may be with others, this was most certainly the case with him,—Valentine was perpetually miserable when he was not amused.

“ It was lamentable how soon this fatal tendency began to show itself. They had not been a month at their own home before he began to look out for entertainment elsewhere.

“ First, he must visit everybody that would visit him, and that of course was almost everybody of consequence at Richmond or in its neighbourhood, and my dear young lady was soon in such a whirl of company that she had never a quiet evening to herself,—I saw she did not quite like this, for there was not much pleasure for her to be found in these societies,—she had been accustomed to live a stiller life,—but she gave in to her husband’s wishes in everything, and seemed only to study his happiness in all she did.

“ Richmond was not a very good place for a young gentleman like Mr. Valentine. There

were two or three of the houses near them, at that time occupied by very dissipated men of fashion. The gaiety of their tempers and the elegance of their manners were just the things to captivate my young master, and he soon was amazingly thick with them all. So thus it went on from one thing to another till gradually the society of people who lived quietly, like the rest of the world, was in a great measure dropped, and his whole time was spent with three or four of these choice spirits,—as men in their folly call such.”

“ And what did the young wife do all this time? How did she like it? She did not—could not——Don’t go on—if she fell into evil courses—I couldn’t bear that. Don’t go on——”

“ You need not be afraid, sir. Lilla Fleming was not the girl you thought her,—or, indeed, any of us thought her,—she was a noble-hearted, lofty, generous creature; pure of heart as an angel. *She* was no Eve to fall a prey to the tempter,—like dew drops from the lion’s mane,—like drops over the white,

unsullied lily,—vice might pass near, but it could not rest upon her. She had that in her which could hold no compromise with vice,—her nature could not blend so,—it cast it off. No, *that* misfortune she was spared. She might regret,—she might look back wistfully upon one, who, with all his faults, was an honest, honourable man,—a man of sense and rectitude,—and compare him with that too beautiful, too amiable, yet perverted being she called husband. She *might* have done so, sir,—I do not say that she did,—she was too virtuous even to indulge a thought like that.”

Craiglethorpe again uttered a low groan, yet he looked relieved.

Mrs. Benfield went on :—

“Lilla loved her husband—I would not for the world imply by my last sentence that she did not. Never was heart so responsive, so grateful for affection as hers; perhaps for one reason, because she had possessed so few relations, and in her life, charming as she was, had received but little of it: but she was naturally of a loving, grateful disposition, and

Valentine, great as were his faults, was ever sweet-tempered and loving. He adored his wife, though she could not, after the first brief months were over, suffice to occupy his life."

"What woman can hope to occupy any man's life—that's a mere childish complaint—Life is a serious thing. Men, such as deserve to be called men, are not made to be tied to women's apron strings."

"True, sir, and the more the pity that Mr. Valentine had not something serious to occupy him. His home would then have been the place where he would have found his recreation and his pleasure—he would not have wanted to seek them elsewhere."

"Things went on. First it was as I have said, a vast deal more visiting than my dear young lady liked—but they went out together, and so far at least all was well. Yet when she came up to dress to go out to dinner, day after day, again and again, how often have I seen her fling herself down upon her chair before her toilette table, in a dissatisfied, wearisome sort of mood, looking so beautiful all

the time, as I caught her figure reflected in the glass, and she would sigh and say, when I asked her what it should be I should look out,—

“ ‘ Oh! never mind—anything you please—there’s choice enough. You must make me fine, of course—all these people will be so very fine, and Valentine likes me to be as grand as the rest. Yes, do up my hair beautifully, that’s a good Benny, it pleases him when his men friends praise and admire me; and, dear fellow, I will give him all the pleasure I can. It’s not much—heigh ho! I wonder whether all Englishmen find home such a stupid place—it did not use to be so with my father.’ ”

“ She used often to indulge in these sort of little complaints to me. She used to make a sort of second mother of me, you know, sir, in those days, and would say that, before me, which she would have died rather than have hinted to any other. But for the rest, it went on to the last as it had ever done, she would not suffer any one to utter a word of

censure against Valentine. She would be all on fire in his defence in a moment, if such were even hinted at. She seemed as if she thought she could never repay his kindness and his love. She prized love and kindness so highly—they were the element on which she lived—she could not exist without them.”

“How happens it in this world,” said Mr. Craiglethorpe, “that reflections and observations which would have been of the greatest value at one period of our lives, seldom suggest themselves till that period is over, when they come too late and are altogether useless?—but go on. The tragical part of your history is yet to come, and though I am aware of the catastrophe, it does not the less interest me.”

“It was a great pity, sir, that Miss Fleming had received so imperfect an education. I used to lament this very much whilst she was yet a child, for I thought it would diminish her attractions, to be wanting in those accomplishments which young ladies in England cultivate so highly—foolish short-sighted crea-

tures as we are ! In the education of women, thinking so much of what will render them captivating, and so little of what will make them happy. The power to vanquish others rather than that of ruling themselves ! Accomplishments I had always looked upon in this trifling light, unconscious till now of the power they give a woman to enliven her home.

“ As for what is called cultivation of the mind, that was never thought of where she came from. She had never had the love of knowledge excited—she had never had her ideas expanded either by reading or experience—she had never had her principles strengthened or elevated by more than a mere superficial religion. She was accustomed to live to the present hour, and her life had been so happy, that she had not found that absolute necessity for consolation which leads so many sufferers to higher and better views.

Her husband was a volatile young man ; but yet I think there was that in him, with which, if she had known how to deal, attached to her

as he was, this fatal spirit of dissipation might have been checked.

“But she had no means of making domestic life interesting ; absolutely none. There were no duties to be performed, no pursuits to be followed up. She had nothing but her loveliness and her grace to adorn, and her sweet natural gaiety to enliven it. To the loveliness and grace men soon get accustomed ; and the gaiety diminishes in the dulness of an unoccupied life.

“Valentine, as I said, got more and more into the habit of going out and of spending his time at man parties ; and then she had to amuse herself as well as she could by going out alone. She was soon weary of that—sometimes she would dress and go out from the mere want of something to do—sometimes she would say it was too much trouble, and would stay at home : and though she came back from a party looking dull and tired, it was still worse when she was left to herself.

“How I have seen her wandering listlessly about upon a fine summer evening, up and

down, up and down their garden, which was bounded by the river! A lovely garden it was, with its beautiful green grass-plats, and the huge willow trees dipping their long tendril branches into the water, softly swinging up and down with every wind. I have seen her sit for hours watching them, having nothing else on earth to do. Then she would get up and stroll among all those beautiful flower borders filled with the finest flowers, the finest carnations and roses, and ranunculuses, and so on, and all sorts of beautiful old-fashioned flowers, as they are thought now—but people used to have abundance of them in those days. But what signifies all the beauty in the world if the *soul* is not in it?

“She would be wandering about in these beautiful gardens as if seeking something—Satisfaction it was. But where to find it?

“She used to fancy she could get it when her husband came home.

“ ‘When will he come home, Benny? Do tell me what o’clock it is?’

“ ‘Only half-past nine!’

“ ‘The moon has been up these two hours, I am sure—look how beautifully it shines upon the Thames between those dark trees there. What a sweet silvery sort of light it throws over those meadows and plantations! How soft and delicious the air is! Hush! Is that the nightingale? No, it’s too late for the nightingale! The reed warbler, perhaps, that sings latest, somebody told me. Oh, dear! Are you *sure* it is only half-past nine? Two hours and a half before he can possibly be back—he never comes home earlier than twelve. Dear me, what shall I do with myself?’

“It was the fashion at that time of day for people to abandon the needlework and embroidery, which so happily passed away many a vacant hour with our grandmothers. Clever men smiled with contempt at such trifling employment, forgetting that every innocent employment is valuable. I did sometimes try to engage Lilla in some kind of work.

“ ‘But why should she work?’ she would say. She had money to buy everything she wanted.

“ ‘And besides,’ she would go on, ‘the poor people look so glad to sell, that it is quite a pleasure to spend one’s money among them. No, for goodness sake, Benny, don’t talk of my sitting down to work here all by myself—that would be *too* stupid. Ah, there goes ten! How soft and slow the tongue of that bell sounds over the water! Oh, how beautiful!—beautiful is the night! But one does not know what to do with all this beauty. Benny, don’t you sometimes wonder why mixed parties are so stupid, that one gets away from them as fast as one can; and why men parties seem so excessively pleasant, that people can never *be* got away from them. What *do* you think they do with themselves?’

“I made no answer. The answer that rose to my lips I dreaded to believe in; but I had heard enough of the characters of some of those men of fashion with whom Valentine associated—as to have very unpleasant suspicions as to the cause which rendered them so attractive. The Honourable Digby Folliet had the reputation of being a professed gambler.

“ All I said, however, was—

“ ‘I don’t pretend to know what makes bachelor parties so pleasant, I am sure; but I don’t think it quite becoming in married men, who have their wives at home, to be so fond of frequenting them.’

“ It was the old story.

“ ‘Hold your tongue, Benny. You know nothing about the matter. I am sure it’s very natural that Valentine, with his gay spirits, poor fellow! should enjoy a little society with happy young men like himself. Men have such spirits; and women, I think, seem to have none. At least, I am sure I have none—I am grown dreadfully stupid.’

“ ‘No wonder you feel stupid when you are left all by yourself so much. You used to be the gayest of the gay once; and I wish Mr. Valentine before he married, had thought a little more of the duties of the state’

“ ‘Duties! As if I should not scorn to have any one stay by me for the sake of duty! I would rather never hear another pleasant, chatting word again, than have a companion

trying to amuse me for the sake of duty ! and so I take care to let Valentine know. I would not have him suspect me of languishing for more of his society than he can take pleasure for his own sake in giving me—no—not for thousands of worlds !

“ ‘ Well, I wish you could persuade him to stay a little more at home, at any rate, for I am very much afraid ’

“ ‘ And of what is the sage Benny very much afraid ? That Mr. Valentine Daubeney does not know enough of the world to be able to take care of himself ?’

“ ‘ Not precisely that. No doubt he knows the world, in one sense, well enough, that is, the outer world ; but as for the inner world—the world of temptation and resistance, of sin and of victory—victory of the good angel, or triumph of the bad—I don’t think he knows much.’

“ ‘ And I am sure no more do I. What unintelligible stuff you do talk sometimes, Benny, quite unworthy of a rational woman !’

CHAPTER VIII.

“But to beware of spendthrifts, as of men,
That seeming in their youth not worse than light,
Would end not so, but with the season change,
For time, she said, that makes the serious soft,
Turns lightness into hardness.”

TAYLOR, *Virgin Widow*.

“THAT night Valentine returned home much later than ever. It was between two and three o'clock before we heard his cab coming up to the door. Lilla, in spite of all I could urge, had insisted upon sitting up to wait for him, and so I sat up with her.

“He came in, looking flushed with wine, hurried and uneasy, and seemed excessively vexed to find her waiting for him.

“For the first time since their marriage he spoke ill-temperedly.

“ ‘What in the name of all that’s good! You up, Lilla, at this time of night! Benfield, how could you be so insane as to let her sit up?’

“ ‘I sat up, because I cannot bear to go to bed and you not come home. I sat up for you—I like to do it.’

“ ‘Very likely you may; but when I say I hate you to do it, I suppose you won’t do it again. It’s very disagreeable for men, I can tell you, when they are out and enjoying themselves a little . . . Curse that dog of yours! he’s always getting under one’s feet. . . . to have a little demon whispering in their ear—better come away, for you’ll find your wife, “like Niobe, all [tears,” sitting, up lamenting you don’t come home.’

“ ‘I am sorry you don’t like to see me; but as for tears! I am not very much given to tears for trifles, I believe. Come, Benny; it’s my rule not to *trouble* any one with my unwelcome company!’

“And she rose to leave the room. Her spirit was up, and she put on her old, cold

manner ; but the cruel pain she suffered, in spite of all her efforts was visible in her eyes.

“She had not crossed the hall, however, before he was after her, and his arm round her waist, and her head against his breast, and a kiss upon her forehead, and ——

“ ‘Oh ! my darling love, forgive me. I was very cross and pettish ; do forgive me. I was so vexed to think I had been keeping you up— And when I should have been so much better at home, too !’

“ ‘It was I who was cross, Valentine,’ was the ready answer. ‘Dear Valentine, I sat up for you because I expected every ten minutes would bring you. I won’t do it again if you don’t wish it ; but it’s such a joy to see you enter the house, I don’t like to miss it.’

“ ‘Me enter the house !—A joy !’ said he, ‘Ay, my love ; and I hope to bring joy another time, and not be so confoundedly miserable, and out of sorts, as I am now. Benfield,’ he cried abruptly, turning to me, seeing my eyes fixed upon him, ‘What are you looking at me in that way for ?’

“ ‘Sir, I beg your pardon ; I was not looking’

“ ‘Wasn’t you—There, my darling,’ releasing her. ‘Go to bed now, and I’ll be a good boy to-morrow, and dine at home, and not go out at all till it’s time for you to go to bed in the evening.’

“ ‘But why *must* you go out every evening, Valentine?’ she said. After all her professions to me I was surprised at even so much as that.

“ ‘I am not going to go out every evening ; but this one evening more I must, but it shan’t be till late. Benfield, take your mistress up stairs. I protest,’ looking at the hall clock, it’s past three o’clock.’

“The next evening, accordingly, it was not until ten o’clock that Mr. Daubeney went out, leaving a charge with me that I should not let Lilla sit up a moment for him. She did not venture to do it. Indeed she was tired with her watching of the night before, and very well inclined to go to sleep.

“She wished me, however, to sit by her

a little while, which I did, and sat there, resolving not to go to my own room till her husband should come home. It was, perhaps, an impertinent curiosity upon my part ; but it sprang from a good motive, my interest in the dear child's happiness.

“ I sat upon an arm-chair by her bed's head, which she would make me take, and held her hand, and she soon sank into the sweetest slumber. Even the little agitation of the day before seemed a wholesome change from the monotonous *ease* of her life.

“ I sat half dozing, half thinking, sometimes sleeping, aroused by every striking of the clock. Three o'clock, four o'clock, five o'clock, and he was not yet come home. At half-past five I heard his cab, not coming to the front door, but driving up to the stables ; and fearful that he would be displeased at seeing me watching, rose to go to my own room ; but I had forgotten before to light the night lamp, and I was delayed a little by doing it ; so that I had not left the passage leading from Mrs. Daubeney's room before I heard him coming up stairs.

"I never shall forget the step. It seemed the very bound of joy; and his face—I caught a glimpse of it—It was one of ecstasy.

"I heard him enter his wife's room—the door was not closed after him,—and his 'Ah, my darling! Have you been well asleep? Before I went into my dressing-room, I could not help just running up stairs to see if you had been a good girl, and done as I bade you.'

" 'Have you had a pleasant evening?' I heard her answer drowsily, like one only half awake.

" 'Charming! charming! But I am not going out again to-morrow, nor to-morrow, nor to-morrow, nor to-morrow. However, it's very late now,' and he left her, and ran down to his dressing-room.

"Never did I see him so gay, so full of charming spirits as he was all the next day—the next week, I might say.

"Alas! such alternations soon became habitual with him.

"She was quite enlivened, quite a new being, during this interval. He drove her

out, he planned little country excursions for her, a thing in which she delighted ; he proposed a long day with his father and mother ; he was everything affectionate, cheerful, delightful. That week, at least, she was happy."

"Now I believe I understand the upshot of this history, for common report, I cannot deny, brought to my ears the various rumours as to what was the true cause of the ruin of this Mr. Valentine of yours. He was neither more nor less than an inveterate gambler. One of those men insane enough to stake his all here, and maybe his all hereafter, upon the turn of a card. One can say nothing of such but that they are madmen—miserable madmen. The thing is inconceivable under any other aspect. It is an infatuation a man in his senses cannot understand ; it is to him perfectly incomprehensible

"I don't mean to deny it. I *had* suspected the truth ; but I had warned her of the risk she was running. She chose to despise my warn-

ing, to reject my friendship, to spurn my advice. I could not flatter and fawn, and therefore I was disliked, and my advice neglected. I did wrong, perhaps, to be angry; but I *was* angry. A man feels these things the more, perhaps, because he . . . Well, well, I was deeply hurt; there's no denying it, and I had vowed to myself, come what would of this preference for the young fellow, I would never interfere again. What was she to me, after all? I left her to her fate. I never allowed myself until this day even to inquire after her fate.

"This day," he went on, "this day when things that are gone rise up before me in fearful recollection—when, for the first time, I begin to feel that time past must be accounted for—but enough of myself! I abandoned her to her fate. But *you*—what were you about? How came it that *you*, her faithful Benny, abandoned her? I want to hear *that*. But you don't seem to like to come to *that*."

"No, sir,—it would not be natural that I should like to come to *that*," answered Mrs.

Benfield, with some spirit. "It is a thing I shall for ever regret. The Reader of hearts knows, and knows alone, how bitter the thought of it has been, and is, to me. And yet, perhaps, if you heard all—but I am not going to tire your patience with the account of that all—you might find some excuse for me; for, indeed, it was hardly possible for me to do otherwise."

"Oh! everybody has good reasons for what they choose to do. I have had enough of my own in my day. The devil never fails in providing us with plausible excuses for what he wants us to be doing. But don't be angry, Mrs. Benfield,—pray don't be offended—I was always a rough, surly fellow, when vexed; and, God knows, I am vexed enough now—but it's not with you."

"My mistake was, sir, that, in my too great anxiety for my dear young lady's happiness, I overstepped the bounds of propriety, perhaps. I had so long been accustomed, and been allowed, to sink the servant in the friend, that I forgot after all that I was but a servant.

My sweet young lady was ready enough to forget it. She wanted a friend, and she was glad to find one in me; but Mr. Valentine never overlooked the distance that separated us, and when he found me venturing upon the part of a friend—when he perceived that I was in the confidence of my mistress, the depository of her anxieties and sorrows—for her troubles soon began to assume the form of real sorrows;—but more than this, when he discovered that I had penetrated his secret, that I more than guessed, that I had ascertained where it was, and how it was, that his evenings were passed, and the true reason for those rapid alternations of spirits and temper which perplexed and distressed his wife—when, at last, in my too incautious zeal, I ventured even so far as to remonstrate—then it was that his impatience burst all bounds, and he resolved to get rid of me—in vulgar phrase, to make the house too hot to hold me.

“He suspected that I watched his return, for my candle might be seen burning through my window, when all the rest of the house

was dark.—He had got latterly into the habit of sending every servant to bed, and letting himself in with the pass-key,—when he saw that candle burning at night, he would be very angry. I did not perceive this at first, only that when I chanced to meet him the following day, he would not speak, would look another way, or sometimes cast a sort of hostile, lowering glance at me. My dear mistress would sometimes say, ‘Benny, what have you done to make Valentine dislike you so? He can’t bear to hear me speak of you with the least affection, and whenever I do, cuts me short with some insinuation, which implies either that I am a great dupe, or you a great hypocrite, or perhaps that we are both the one and the other. I wish you would endeavour not to displease Valentine, Benny; it’s so disagreeable to have two people that one loves at variance.’

“ ‘I am sorry I can’t give satisfaction, ma’am, to my master,’ I would answer; ‘I am not aware that I do anything to *deserve* his displeasure; but so long as I can make myself

agreeable to you, I can't say that I am going to put myself out about it.'

" ' Ah! but, Benny, you can't give satisfaction to me if you displease him—you know very well that's impossible. And, therefore, I must insist upon knowing what it is that you do to vex him. And I must make a point of having your conduct altered in that particular, whatever it may be.'

"I answered nothing, but that I would do my best to please, as she wished it to be so; but made no further promises.

"At last, one day—oh! sir, there are *such* days in this life; one can never forget them, nor should, if one lived millions of years—one day, his poor father, poor old Mr. Daubeney, came down to Richmond, to see his son. He took the opportunity when my dear young lady had gone up to London to do some shopping, taking Selina with her. She had happened to leave me at home, *unluckily*, as I now think—most *unluckily*; for had I not been there, I should never have gotten into the scrape I did.

‘The breakfast-room at the Richmond house opened into the garden by a French window, and upon the lawn before it there stood two magnificent willow-trees, their branches literally sweeping the ground; and under them was a bench and a table before it, where we used to lay cut flowers, and where we used to dress the beau pots, as they were called in those days. Now, behind these willow-trees there came the thick hedge and paling which separated the garden from the next property; and you could not go from this seat to the house without passing through the breakfast-room window, or, at least, so close by it that every one in the breakfast-room must see you pass.

“Now, I am not going to excuse myself, but it was false shame, not deliberate treachery, which led me to the steps I took. It seems always so very wrong to sit quietly by and listen to a conversation it is never intended you should hear, that now I look back upon it, I am astonished how I could be guilty of such conduct. But I

thought differently about many things then from what I do now.

'To do evil that good might come neither appeared to me such a crime, nor such a folly, as the experience of life has taught me to regard it.'

"Well, well—you sat by and heard father and son talk family secrets, in the confidence that there was no one to overhear them—that was all. I don't suppose that it is a heinous offence in the eyes of any woman to gratify by any means her natural spirit of curiosity. On the contrary, I rather wonder you think so much about it now, as you seem to do."

"Ah! sir, life would be a miserable thing indeed, if it did not open our eyes to our mistakes; but I confess——"

"Never mind—I was a fool to interrupt you. So you heard them talk?"

"Yes, sir. The window into the garden stood, as I said, wide open. Mr. Valentine had been walking up and down the breakfast-room, in a very restless, uncomfortable manner, ever since my young mistress went away.

Sometimes he would come and look through the window, and stand there gazing, as if in deep reverie; then crossing his arms over his breast—I think I see him now—thus, sir, with his fists clenched, and one against each shoulder, begin pacing up and down again. I had never seen him look more miserable than he did just then. It was one of his losing days.

“He had returned to the open window, and was standing there—I saw him plainly, but he could not see me through the branches, and was watching his look anxiously—when I heard the breakfast-room door open, and the voice of the butler saying, ‘Mr. Daubeney,—your father, sir.’

“I saw Valentine start. He looked hurriedly round, as if for a moment he meditated escape; then he seemed to recollect himself; but he coloured high, and strove to hide it by passing his hand through his curling hair, and went forwards, greeting his father with an attempt, at least, at his usual merry laugh. But it would not quite do, and sounded hollow

and forced. 'I am delighted to see you, sir,' he cried; 'how well you are looking! Oh! I beg your pardon—you shake your head—no, you are not looking well at all. Does anything ail you, sir? My mother—is she well?'

"All this was said in a hurried manner, with what seemed almost an affectation of cordiality and affection, but much real emotion was evidently, by a great effort, suppressed.

CHAPTER IX.

“Not for this grew in thee the might of mind,
The power to will, and act thy will and thought;
If in these vain delights thou wouldest find
All pleasure; life shall set thy aims at nought.”

W. C. BENNETT.

“‘No, my son, I am not well,’ I heard the father say, in a low, trembling voice.

“‘Take a chair. Sit down, pray, sir.—Here, by the window; the fresh air, this morning, is delightful. ‘Would create a soul under the ribs of death.’ Ha, ha,—The arm-chair. sir, it’s a most delightful place to snooze in, as I and Lilla find when we are tired of matrimonial disputes—ha, ha—But what will you take? You must have something. I have

some delicious champagne—but that you would, perhaps, not like at this time of day, hot as it is. Soda-water, with a little brandy. . . .’

“ ‘Don’t pull the bell, Valentine. I should not take any thing, thank you.’

“Did you know Mr. Daubeney, sir?—I think not.”

Craiglethorpe nodded.

“He was a man worth knowing.

“I never saw age more revered in the simplicity of righteousness—as I once heard somebody call it—than his. Never was face, figure, dress, manner, more plain, more simple, more free from adventitious ornament.

His only ornament was those snow-white hairs, falling something scantily round a face which expressed rectitude, simplicity, gentleness, and kindness itself, adorned with a something hard to describe, which commanded respect. Something which said that so kind, and gentle, as he was, no person on earth could make him swerve from what he had determined upon; and something still more hard to describe which

assured you, that what he so determined upon would be right.

“ I loved, and honoured, and revered him ; but who did not—revere, honour, and love Mr. Daubeney?”

And taking up the words of the heart-broken prophet—the ruined, heart-broken, and patient man—Mrs. Benfield, rising to a tone of enthusiasm, thus went on:—

“ Oh that I were as in months past—when the Almighty was yet with me—when my children were around me—when I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured out rivers of oil.

“ When I went out to the gate through the city. . . . The young men saw me and hid themselves, and the aged arose and stood up. The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth.

“ When the ear heard me, then it blessed me, and when the eye saw me it gave witness unto me, because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless and him that had none to help him.

“True, sir, I never looked upon—and I never think upon old Mr. Daubeney without, in my own mind, associating him with that ancient, venerable, and suffering man, once holding so high a place among the men of his generation, when broken, ruined, and prostrate upon the earth, he lay with his hoary locks scattering in the dust.

“Well—well.”

“Forgive me. I forget where I am. I was going to say that I had always been accustomed to see Mr. Daubeney, in spite of his plain attire and simple manners, invested with a certain simple dignity of appearance arising from that honourable peace within, which springs from an untroubled conscience; added to the sense of security in an honourable position of life, achieved by industry, perseverance, and sobriety of aim and purpose.

“I had never seen Mr. Daubeney ruffled or disturbed—there was an habitual calmness

in his demeanour. He had been a picture of composed and serene old age—but he was very much altered now.

“As he accepted the place offered him by his son, I could see him perfectly through the branches behind which I stood ; for the arm-chair was placed close by the window.

“Whatever might or might not be the first impression produced upon Mr. Valentine, I know very well what mine was. I was unfeignedly shocked at the change in Mr. Daubeney's appearance.

“‘Don't pull the bell, Valentine,’ he said, extending his hand, as if to stop him, ‘I shall not take anything.’

“‘But, my dear sir,’—still in a sort of officious hurry, as if to hide his own confusion, and avoid anything like serious conversation with his father—‘you don't look well, indeed you don't—you had better I must insist—you really are not well—’

“‘True, Valentine,’ he said again, gently shaking his head—‘I am *not* well—but sit down, son—sit down, Valentine.’

“The young man coloured, hesitated, looked distressed, confused, but said no more, and finally sat down upon the edge of a small chair, which stood in the same window opposite to that of his father.

“‘Valentine—it is useless to attempt to conceal your agitation from me. There is that within us all which bears its testimony to truth whether we will or not—and it is at this moment telling you why it is that I am here—and why not in my usual good looks, Valentine’

Again the young man attempted to laugh—but again he succeeded ill. The laugh was hoarse and faint. He seemed choking rather than laughing.

“‘My dear sir—my dear father. If it comes to that, I am afraid I never was upon very good terms with the monitor you allude to. I’ve found him a troublesome guest in the little chamber inside one’s breast ever since I can remember. I wonder the good gentleman is not tired of remonstrating, having met with so little encouragement; and, egad! I wish sometimes he would—ha! ha!’”

“‘Don’t wish that, Valentine. Wish rather that his voice might be raised till he clamoured so loudly that, in spite of yourself, he might be heard—wish—pray—that the levity of your character may be so far corrected that you may learn seriousness enough to attend seriously to that voice.’”

“‘Ah, sir! You say well. There it is’—answered the young man, in some degree, as it appeared, relieved by this last speech—the charge of general levity and want of thought he was accustomed to. He had been trembling lest a more specific accusation should be impending.

“‘Ah, sir! you say well. There it is. That cursed levity is my besetting sin. I vow, serious thought seems impossible to me. My spirits are still—shall I say thank Heaven for it, or not—too buoyant for the gravity of this drab-coloured world. I can’t help it—confound me if I can. They will dance, do what I will in cuffing them about to teach them to sit still. But you shall see—time ——’

“‘I have no cause to complain of the buoy-

ancy of your spirits just now, Valentine. I see, plainly enough, in spite of all your efforts to conceal it—the depression and agitation under which you are suffering—and, to speak my opinion plainly, under present circumstances, such is the only condition of mind which becomes you.’

“ ‘Present circumstances, sir!’

“ ‘Present circumstances, Valentine. Why should you attempt to conceal that with which you must be by this time aware I am well acquainted—your present circumstances, young man?’

“ ‘Why, sir, I don’t precisely know to which of my present circumstances you particularly allude, but really, you are quite enigmatical this morning, father. Pray, sir, it is your custom to be plain—pray, sir, speak out.’

“ ‘I am going so to do.’

“ ‘There was a pause. The young man turned ashy pale, the father seemed waiting to take breath as for some great effort.

“ ‘When he spoke, however, it was not quite as I expected, for I thought some fearful

charge, accompanied with a burst of parental anger, was about to burst forth. For Mr. Daubeney's countenance during the conversation I have related, had assumed an unwonted sternness.

"But the countenance softened. An eye of deep, fond, tender regret was cast upon his son, and moistened with, but not actually in tears. And——

"‘Oh, boy! boy! what a crown to thy poor father's and mother's life thou mightest have been!’

"Was uttered in a tone of mingled tenderness and regret, which I shall never cease to remember.

"The young man seemed to feel the full force of this tender appeal.

"Slowly his head drooping, he turned himself around upon his chair, away from his father, and sank his face upon his hand. He seemed bowed down with sorrow and shame, and as yet not an accusation had been made.

"Alas! he knew too well what was coming.

“ ‘Valentine,’ pursued Mr. Daubeney, recovering his stern gravity, ‘What is this I have heard of you?’

“ Silence—there was not a word in answer, but the body more and more bowed down, the head sunk between the two hands, which now covered the face entirely.

“ ‘Young man, I say, what is this which I have heard of you?’

“ There was a stifled groan.

“ ‘That my son—is a confirmed *gambler*.’

“ I saw the young man’s chest contract, his shoulders drawn together as one in an agony of bodily pain; but he uttered not a syllable nor a sound,—

“ ‘It is not what you have lost,’ the father went on, in a voice which had now assumed a melancholy severity.

“ ‘That is much—but that is nothing. It is the thing—the act—the habit—the fatal, the disgraceful habit. Oh, Valentine! Valentine! so young and so fallen!’

“ The young man’s head sank lower and lower, till the hands which covered his face

rested upon his knee—still he neither spoke nor groaned, nor even sighed.

“ ‘Such hopes as your poor mother and I had entertained!—Such a future as had been built upon your head, and that of the sweet creature to whom we had allied you—and all—all—’

“ ‘Some muttered words now broke from the son—I could only hear them indistinctly—a few reached me, such as—‘Sir!—father!—Lilla—miserable—abandoned.’

“ ‘The father’s heart I could see was even now relenting—the stern voice faltered, the eye softened.

“ ‘I see you are miserable, Valentine ; poor boy!’ he said. ‘Would only that you could be sufficiently miserable—’

“ ‘That I am, sir,’ cried Valentine, suddenly raising his head, ‘what would you have? I am, and long have been, as miserable a wretch as walks upon this blasted and God forsaken earth!’

“ ‘Ah!’ said the father, regarding him with such a look as a blessed spirit might have cast

upon a fallen angel, 'Is it so? Then you have not even found happiness in this fatal career? No doubt—no doubt—It is madness and it is misery.'

" 'I have found it so.'

" 'Then by what wretched infatuation have you been led to persevere in it?'

" 'Oh, sir, it is a vortex, a maelstrom!—Once entered within its gulph, it is an overwhelming fatality—The losses of yesterday irresistibly impel to the endeavour to repair them by the gains of to-day. The gains of to-day to pursue a good fortune which may lead to a final triumph on the morrow.—Tomorrow sweeps away the to-day's false dream, and in its madness of despair—were it your soul, nay, the souls of all you love that you had to stake, you must cast them on the issue!—to win or lose all.'

"The colour had returned to the faded cheek, the bright flashing to the listless eye, as thus he spoke with a sort of wild enthusiasm. His father gazed silently and steadily at him.

" 'You have described it well,' he said at

last. ‘Such is a gambler’s existence—Such yours *has* been, Valentine—The question is, what is it hence to be?’

“‘Is this to have an end?’ he continued; ‘Is my son by one manly determined struggle to emancipate himself from the vortex which he describes—from the clutches of this dangerous deadly sin? Or is he to sink—sink—sink? Speak Valentine, speak, boy—say all is not lost yet!’

“But the son answered not, I looked in his face. I longed to see the generous purpose kindling there. But no light appeared. A dark, troubled, unsettled, restless, despairing expression was all. . . .’

“Valentine could not dissemble,—that, at least, was not in his nature. He saw the gulph that yawned before his feet clearly as did his unhappy father; but it seemed as if all power to make a generous effort—even the power to *wish* to make a generous effort was no more.

“He answered gloomily:—

“‘If I were to promise, I should probably

only be dishonouring myself. I believe an inveterate gambler never yet was cured; and I have been one more or less ever since I went to College.'

" 'That is a hardened confession, at least,' said the father, with severity.

" 'It's a true one, however,' was the reply, with a something of defiance in his air. 'I wish I could be a better boy, sir, but it's not in me—I can't. If I were to swear I would never touch a card again, the first time I saw a card I should break my oath—I know I should. What will you do with me? Strangle me you had best at once, as you would a loathsome viper who is crawling over your threshold. I shall never be good for anything here—I know it, and I feel it.'

" A strange contrast this hardened speech from the penitence and shame with which he had appeared to be bowed down the moment before! But that was just] Valentine. He was never the same being two minutes together. Whether it was his father's last speech—whether it was that sort of reckless despair

which comes over those who feel themselves too weak to retrace the fatal steps taken in wrong or burst the strong fetters of long-indulged habit, I know not, but thus it was.

“ ‘ Were I such a father as I have read of, I should perhaps do what you advise, wretched young man,’ resumed Mr. Daubeney, with a solemn melancholy which went to my very heart, ‘ but those days of stern domestic rule are gone by. You choose, then, I am to understand, to persist in a course in which you will not only perish yourself, but by which you will inevitably entail ruin and disgrace upon us all—All who have loved you and fostered you ?’

“ ‘ Choose ! I didn’t say choose !’ cried Valentine, ‘ and it were easy for me to flatter myself and you by vain words. But this is not the first time, do you think it is ? No, nor the hundredth and first time, that I have forsworn this fatal infatuation. Do you think, sir, I have no remorse, no feeling, no understanding ?—that I am a blind, stumbling, brute beast, that I cannot see, that I do not know ?’

Thousands and thousands of times I have sworn for my own sake, for all your sakes, most of all for *her* sake, never to stake a shilling more—and in less than a week I have staked thousands. I know myself, sir—If I could deceive myself, gladly, gladly would I deceive you—but I can't. Experience has been too faithful—I cannot save myself—and, no power on earth can save me.'

" 'And is there no other Power, Valentine? A Power above this earth, that lends strength to aid the brave resolve in breaking through such frightful enthrallments.'

"The young man's countenance gave not the slightest respond to this last appeal; it was plain *that* excited not the least corresponding feeling. He was one of those, who having found all the moral powers with which, in this world, he was surrounded, too weak to restrain him, would have thought it futile, indeed, to rest upon those of another.

"I saw the father's countenance, as he looked at his son.

"He gazed intently for a few seconds, then

he heaved a deep sigh, and these words broke forth : low, but so distinctly, that I heard them every one :—

“ I have thought too little of *that* myself.”

“ Father and son—accuser and criminal ; suffering both—helpless both—deserted both—wretched both ; so they sat in silence and in despair.

“ The father felt and knew that the last words he had uttered had been said rather in a faint despairing hope,—as a last chance for awakening a better feeling, than from any earnest, real conviction on his own part, of their real truth and efficacy ; or of the actual living existence of the Power to which, in his despair, he had appealed. He perceived how utterly inefficient this last appeal had been in producing any effect upon the mind of his son, and felt, too, how different it would and might have been, had that son, from the first, been led by his example, to look higher and

further for the origin of his motives, and the source of responsibility in his actions, than to those maxims of mere unassisted morality which had proved sufficient to guide his own tranquil character. And now, too, for the first time in his own life, perhaps, as he spoke, he became himself aware of the real value, importance, and absolute necessity, of that golden chain which unites earth and heaven, summons conscience to the bar of a Judge, from whose award there is no appeal; and he was struck with a sense of deepest horror as he at once comprehended the futile emptiness of the education he had given to his darling child.

“He understood the frail nature of those principles, upon which he had taught him to lean. Principles based upon the unstable and fleeting sand of this world’s opinion, not upon the everlasting Rock of ages, the Infinite of righteousness and truth.

“The poor old man thus suddenly awakened to a sense of the miserable inefficacy of the teachings he had so long respected, sat there looking bewildered and dismayed, gazing at his

son, who remained before him, thrown back in his chair, his hair dishevelled,—his face filled with a sort of wild distraction—his eyes vacant and staring, wandering over the garden.

“I saw poor Mr. Daubeney look, first at his son, then down upon himself; his hands which lay extended upon his knees began to tremble; the trembling spread—his whole frame began to shake violently.

“The young man turned suddenly round, and starting up in terror, cried out:—

“‘Father, what’s the matter? You are very ill!’

“‘It will be over soon—let me be. Yes, get me a glass of hot water. Nothing but hot water. No, not wine or brandy, for the world. My God!—my God! My son!—my son!’

“And quite overcome at last, the poor old man yielded, and burst into tears.

“‘What a brute!—What a wretch!—What a demon I have been!’ cried Valentine, struck to the very soul by the sight. He fell on one knee beside his father; he seized his hand,—he kissed it,—he went on impetuously, pouring

forth promise upon promise, oath upon oath. Calling down upon his head the most dreadful imprecations if he did not adhere to his resolutions,—break up his old habits, fly from his evil companions, and never give cause of pain to his father more.

“Alas!—Alas!—It was dreadful, yet most affecting, to hear him. His heart was naturally good. Woe! woe! that it was thus left to its own vain, unassisted impulses.

“Mr. Daubeney would have stopped him,—and yet it was plain that he took comfort in these assurances, impetuous as they were.

“He felt hope revive—He had faith in this earnestness.

“Alas! he knew not how often before such vows had been made, to be broken. He was glad to disbelieve the fatal truth, though his son's own lips had declared it.

“Indeed, poor old man, he was so entirely struck down by the scene which had passed; so entirely broken by what he had gone through then, and had been going through ever since he had heard of his son's misconduct, that he was

by this time totally unfit for any bodily exertion whatsoever.

“Valentine more and more deeply affected by seeing this, showed a tenderness and concern that must have re-assured almost any parent ; much more one so good as poor Mr. Daubeney.

“Observing his father’s chilliness and trembling still to continue, I saw Valentine with the gentle earnestness endeavouring to persuade his father to let him move his chair farther from the window, which he did ; and then the window was shut down, and I saw Valentine ring the bell, and a fire was lighted, and the two went and sat down by it. And I neither saw or heard more, but was able to make my escape, unperceived, to the house.”

Here Mrs. Benfield stopped exhausted, but Craiglethorpe made no observation.

He sat there deeply musing in his chair—the string again was touched which had lately been awakened. Those reflections with which

he had already been so busy were once more aroused. He saw in Mr. Daubeney, as far as the higher life of our being is concerned, a sort of reflex of himself. He, too, had been suddenly startled into a sense of the emptiness, the futility, the weakness, and the worthlessness, of a life spent merely with reference to this world. He, too, had gazed with something appertaining to horror, at the awful prospect suddenly presented, of the actual existing reality of a higher and a better.

He, too, felt as the poor father had felt, the impossibility of working upon a mind like that of Valentine, by arguments drawn from this world's maxims alone, and the necessity for a something—a help—a power—an independent force, as it were, to work upon and strengthen a mind so morally enfeebled.

He sat ruminating in this way for some time, then he started from his reverie and again repeated :—

“Go on—.”

CHAPTER X.

“Vain I know is all complaining,
Words I know, are useless all,
Though in blood my heart were raining
All the tears that from me fall.”

W. C. BENNETT.

MRS. BENFIELD obeyed :—

“Sir, this scene, as you will suppose, made a great impression upon me. I loved and respected Mr. Daubeney, and had long been accustomed to regard him not only as one of the best, but as one of the happiest, and one of the most enviable of men.

“I do not know how it happens, but I think there is something peculiarly affecting when those whom we are accustomed to look upon

as peculiarly prosperous; as more than usually secured from the vicissitudes of life, are suddenly struck down by some unexpected blow. Our natural equity seems to fail us here. We strike no balance between this man's and that man's portion. We forget how much happiness the one may have secured, which the other perhaps has never tasted. The force of the contrast seizes upon the imagination, and we are carried away by sympathy with the tremendous change."

Craiglethorpe made a gesture of impatience, but offered no remark. He loved not moral reflections. Few of them were new to him. And, of the futility of mere moral reflections experience and observation had made him too well aware. But he had never considered how still worse than that of making moral reflections in vain, was the case of him who made no such reflections at all.

Observations of this nature from an aged woman like Mrs. Benfield, though she did not want sagacity, were not very likely to strike with any particular force upon a mind such as his.

In his impatience he was frequently tempted to start from his chair, and put an end to the conversation at once; but a strange fascination rivetted him to the spot.

Something in his heart enchained him to recollections that could not die—the history of Lilla's fate. To follow her—to attend her, though only in thought, painful as it was—felt like a consolation.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said Mrs. Benfield, again repeating her apologies. “I was going on to tell you how it happened that I left my dear, dear Miss Fleming.”

“Yes; it is that I want to hear. I wonder how you ever found the heart to do it. You, a woman! You ought to have had the sympathy for your sex, at least! But women, I have often observed, when once offended, are more implacable, more obdurate, more unforgiving, than even men; and the weakest among them the hardest hearted. Go on.”

“*You* should not be severe with me, I think, sir; I have been severe enough with myself,

and yet, when I come to look back upon it, it seems as if it could scarcely have been helped."

"Old Mr. Daubeney refused to stay at his son's house that night, as Mr. Valentine earnestly pressed him to do. He insisted upon being carried home to his house in the city,—the house in which you now are, sir—to his own chamber, the chamber in which you at this moment are sitting, sir."

" 'In this room! Why did you bring me into this room?' and Mr. Craiglethorpe changed countenance, and looked round, something as one might do, if, when listening to a ghost story, the spectre before which the imagination is shuddering, should suddenly appear before him; but he recovered himself in a moment, and his attention seemed more intent than ever upon the relation.

"Whether it was owing to moving him in the state of agitation he was in, or what it might be, I know not; but he was taken

desperately ill in the night after he got home, and he lay there some time between life and death.

“Then Mr. Valentine was obliged to rouse himself, and to take an active part in the management of his father’s business. He had never done this before, and he was supposed to be very ill qualified for the task ; but that proved not to be the case. I have heard Mr. Prideaux, the head clerk, when talking over these affairs afterwards, say, that the young gentleman showed a very extraordinary capacity for business when once he entered seriously into it.

“It seemed as if, heart struck with the condition of his father, which he justly attributed to his own misconduct, there was no atonement he thought too great to offer. And certainly the best he could make was to effect an entire change in his conduct and habits, and, by a strenuous endeavour supply, as far as possible, his father’s place, maintaining his interests, whilst thus laid totally aside.

“This, young Mr. Daubeney accomplished in the most surprising manner.

“The close of the year was now approaching, and the mornings were for the season particularly raw, gusty, and cold; yet that young man was punctually up at six every morning—he who used to lie a bed till ten, eleven, twelve o’clock, or later, as the humour might take him. Exact as the clock, on horse-back he was at half-past seven, and in his father’s counting-house before the clock struck nine. Once there, as Mr. Prideaux said, he was indefatigable. No subject was too perplexed, no account too intricate to escape his investigation; he laboured at it indefatigably until he understood it. On subjects requiring the exercise of a rapid and decisive judgment, the clearness and perspicuity of his view, rendered him equal to anything. Every exertion, however painful, when demanded, was unhesitatingly made. He was as determined as he was intelligent and clever.”

“He’s coming out a wonderful hero at

last," interrupted Mr. Craiglethorpe, with some ill-humour. "A very different kind of a personage from what I, or any one else I ever heard of, took him to be."

"True, sir, if this could but have lasted; but, unhappily, no good impression lasted long with Mr. Valentine. It reminds one of the Arabs, as we found them in the East, sir. Their first efforts would be stupendous—nothing could exceed them in indefatigable energy and resolution; but such things lasted but for a time. They were soon exhausted, wearied, discouraged, and became as spiritless, indifferent, indolent, and inactive, as they had formerly been ardent. Perseverance seems to them impossible.

"True, Valentine did not sink into quite this listless state of languor; but perseverance in any course, with one fatal exception, he seemed incapable of. He soon grew tired of exertion; and a life of regularity and order, when it had lost the zest of novelty, became intolerable to him.

"Even whilst his father still lay a prisoner

upon that sick bed to which his son's misconduct had brought him ; that misconduct, sad to say, was repeated.

“At the beginning the young man would come home in high spirits, delighted with a good day's work, and with that wholesome appetite for simple pleasures which the toil of a good day's work occasions. I never saw Lilla look so happy. He would return in exuberant spirits. If the evenings were cold and raw, to enjoy his own fire side ; if soft and fine, as late autumn evenings sometimes are, to enjoy the fresh air of his own garden, or a row upon the river, which flowed at the end of their grounds.

“Sunday, too, that yawning, tiresome Sunday, which he used to find so wearisome, became a day of great enjoyment. After church, to which he had begun to go regularly, he would drive his wife about Richmond Park, in her little pony-chaise, come home, sit down as gaily to his dinner as if surrounded by company, rest or sleep upon the sofa, quite tired out, perhaps read some book or another with a

quite new zest, go early to bed, and arise in the morning blythe as a lark to the renewal of his labours.—But, dear me, this could not last long with him.

“He soon began to tire, and weary of this perpetual employment, and then he grew sick of his tasteless life, as he called it. These simple recreations lost their charms, when business had lost its power of excitement; first it would be one night in a week that, for about an hour or so, after my young mistress was gone to bed, he would steal out through the side garden-gate, evidently anxious not to be seen. Unfortunately, my window looked over that very way, and I could not help seeing him. Soon these escapades would occur more frequently, and the time of his absence be prolonged. At last, by degrees, first slowly, latterly with frightful rapidity, all the old habits were resumed. He still for some time, however, continued to be pretty punctual in his visits to his father’s counting-house, but what a haggard, worn face would he carry there, when after having been out late,—till two,

three o'clock in the morning, as it got to be, he would rise after a sleepless night, and be off at the accustomed hour!

“ I did foolishly, perhaps,—I watched him go out, and I could not help watching to see him come in—and, more than that, I kept my candle purposely burning in my window, that he might know that he was watched, with the foolish idea that it might prove some check upon him, to know that there was one who was aware of what he did. As if any young man were likely to submit to that—and from a servant, or one little above a servant ——

“ But I did more.

“ I saw by his manner to me, that though he did not choose to acknowledge that he had observed my candle burning at the hour it did—which would have been in a manner to acknowledge the irregularity of his own habits—he was out of humour and displeased with me. But I saw plainly he did not venture to make any complaints to my young lady, for though his manner showed far more discontent than it had ever done, if I chanced to meet him alone,

before my young lady, it remained much the same; and hers was as cordial as ever.

“ I suffered horridly all this time myself, sir; I was tormented with doubts as to what I ought to do. My heart was distracted between that nervous horror one has of being thought impertinently busy in other people’s affairs, by offering remonstrance or advice uncalled for—and a sense of the cowardly selfishness of sitting by in silence when such fearful ruin was impending over the head of her I loved above every one else in the world.

“ It has been my poor endeavour through life, when my poor mind has been thus rent by contradictory feelings, to adhere to that course which, however disagreeable, seemed most accordant with my duty; and in deciding upon what was most accordant with duty, I have, perhaps, mistakenly—yet it seems a safe and honest mistake—I have usually chosen that alternative which was to me the most unpleasant; fearing lest my judgment might be warped by inclination.

“ It was plain enough what way inclination

would have led now. There was something perfectly dreadful to me in the idea of speaking. Upon that very account, I decided that it would be right to speak."

"I am not surprised;—most women love to be busy, and the inclination for meddling is, in most cases, stronger than the fear of being thought impertinent. Well, I suppose you got as much by your interference as meddlers usually do."

"Precisely so, sir, or worse.

"One morning, the custom of going to town daily, in which, since his father's illness, he had persevered, was broken. I had watched him coming in very late, between four and five o'clock that morning, and when I was dressing my mistress, she told me that Valentine was not well, and that she had persuaded him to take his breakfast in bed, 'and you shall take it to him directly, Benny,' said she, taking the keys and hurrying out of the room before she was well finished, 'for I want you to see him, he looks to me feverish, and all on the bad, and yet won't hear of a doctor. Do take

his tea, and tell me what you think is the matter.'

"The moment is come I thought, and the thought went cold to my heart. Now or never, —I must and I will speak.

"Mr. Craiglethorpe, at this moment I assure you, I was as much influenced by my deep compassion for his father, as by my anxiety for my dear young lady. I could not get the voice of old Mr. Daubeney out of my head. And to think of him still lying between life and death, and that already his son had returned to his fatal habits!

"I followed my dear young lady down stairs, and found her in much haste making the tea for her husband, and looking very flurried and uncomfortable. I saw she could scarcely help crying, but she said nothing. That dear hand of hers, how it trembled as she filled out the cups, and then I felt still more for her than for poor Mr. Daubeney, and so I was up and down, but all the more strongly resolved to seize the opportunity of speaking to Valentine.

“When we are very strongly persuaded of a thing ourselves, we have a sort of confidence that we shall be able to persuade others to look upon it in the light we do. I saw the frightful wretchedness and dreadful consequences of the course young Mr. Daubeney was pursuing, and the inevitable ruin it must bring upon himself and all, in so strong a light, that I was almost certain of convincing him ; whilst my intentions were really so pure, that I felt sure he would not be lastingly offended. I was nervous, it is true, for it was a serious undertaking ; but I did not think that there was anything really to fear.

“He was lying on his bed, dressed in a rich coloured dressing-gown, and his fine white linen showing to perfection the beauty of his face and complexion, as did the attitude in which he lay the surpassing elegance of his figure. He was thrown back against the white trimmed pillows, and his fine brown hair lay in dishevelled curls round his beautiful forehead and eyes. I thought I never saw human being more beautiful than he looked at that moment.

“His face was, however, somewhat flushed, and there was an unnatural paleness about his mouth ; and his fine eyes were filled with anxiety—an expression which added to the interest of his appearance.

“‘Who’s there?’ he exclaimed, hastily and somewhat impatiently, as I opened the door.

“‘It is only I, sir—Only Benfield, come to bring you your breakfast.’

“He turned suddenly round, raised his head upon his hand, and resting his elbow upon the pillow, eyed me in a peculiar manner.

“‘Only you! And, pray, who sent you hither? Oh! it’s my breakfast, is it? Why was it not brought up by Charles?’

“‘My young lady begged me to bring it up myself, sir. She is uneasy about you, Mr. Daubeney, and asked me to come up and tell her whether I really thought anything serious was the matter.’

“‘Nonsense! What a fuss she makes! I told her nothing on earth was the matter, only

that I had had a sleepless night. I don't know what was in me—perhaps the room was too hot.'

"I cast down my eyes at this ; I could not help it. He observed, and understood me—An evil conscience makes us marvellously acute in discerning implied blame—and he said haughtily :

" 'Put the tea down directly, and leave the room. Send Charles : I desire to be waited upon by Charles.'

"I put down the things, as he bade me ; but I would not leave the room. I went to the other end of it, to fetch a small table to put by his bed-side, and set the things upon. I felt the tears coming into my eyes, for now my feelings had taken a new change. It was no longer his old father, not even his lovely young wife, I was thinking of. It was himself—So like a ruined angel he looked, as there he lay."

"Pish !"—from Mr. Craiglethorpe.

"I kept dawdling over the tea things, putting them down in one way, changing them

again for another, till, quite angrily, he exclaimed :

“ ‘ What *are* you about ? Can’t you let the things alone, and go about your business, and send Charles ? ’

“ I lifted up my head, fixed my eyes full upon his, and said :

“ ‘ Oh, Mr. Valentine ! ’

“ ‘ Oh what ? ’ he answered tartly ; ‘ What do you mean by your oh’s ?—Standing there with the tears in your eyes, like a tragedy queen ! That’s the way you get round your mistress. ’

“ ‘ I get round no one, sir ! ’

“ The whole burst forth at last.

“ ‘ You do me injustice, Mr. Daubeney—Indeed you do. To attempt to rule any one was never my wish—far less the master and mistress, that ought to rule me. But oh, sir ! oh, Mr. Valentine ! If a poor woman might presume to speak, whose whole heart is with you and yours—Oh, Mr. Daubeney !—do—do—pray do—think of where I know you were last night !—think of the——’

“ ‘ Where you know I was last night ! ’ inter-

rupting me, and, starting from his bed to the floor, he came up and confronted me closely, his eyes sparkling with fury—‘where you know I was last night!—And where do you pretend to know I was last night?—And how dare you presume to know anything about where I choose to be? I tell you I will bear no eaves-droppers in my house—I will not endure to have spies set over *my* actions. What! is it come to this? Do you dare—or has your mistress dared——’

“ ‘Oh no, sir!—no, sir!’ I cried hastily—‘not my mistress—only myself. She knows nothing in the world about it!’

“ ‘About it!—about what? About *it*!—what do you mean? How dare you?—Yes, yes—I understand.—It’s not for nothing I have seen your candle burning in that window night after night at such undue hours! But, I tell you, it’s not to be borne, and it shall not be borne. You take upon yourself the office of spy upon me! Yes, I have longed for some time to have it out with you—and out with you it shall be now, with a vengeance—and

out of this house you shall troop in an hour !
It !—what !

“ Thus he ran on furiously. I was astounded ; I stood before him trembling—abashed. Why should *I* have felt abashed ? It was for him to feel abashed—not I. Yet the accusation of being a spy has something in it so humiliating,—and a sort of spy I had been.

“ But I struggled for courage ; and I did at last find breath and strength to say :

“ ‘ Ah, sir ! would that before I leave this house—if leave it I must——’

“ ‘ Leave it you shall—and this very hour,’ he cried passionately.

“ ‘ Before I leave it, then—as leave it I *will*’—for now my blood began to warm in its turn—‘ hear me speak out, Mr. Daubeney. Oh, sir ! is all that your poor father—your worthy, excellent father—said that morning, to be clean forgotten ?—All his earnest warnings against these fatal, fatal courses to be vain ? His sufferings—his illness—his probable death—all without avail ? And your

wife!—My young lady!—my once gay, happy young lady! Oh, Mr. Valentine, think of what you are about!’

“ ‘My father, you say! And how come you to know anything about what my father said or did, or did not say or do, that morning? Eaves-dropping again!—Listening at doors, it seems. I thought Mrs. Benfield had been at least above that.’

“ ‘Sir, I own I was wrong.’

“ ‘Wrong!’ exclaimed he, ‘I should think so.’

“ ‘But indeed it was unintentional—almost unavoidable. Yet, since that day when I did—I confess I did—chance to overhear much of what passed, I have thought of almost nothing else. And oh, Mr. Valentine! warned as you were—entreated as you were—your father in so affecting a condition—your wife, if possible, in a more affecting condition still—hear me!—let me pray!—let me beg!’

“ ‘*You pray!—You beg!—You interfere!*—I’ll tell you what, Mrs. Benfield, I never suffered any one to interfere with me, be they who they may, or what they may; and I am

not going to begin with you. I tell you I made up my mind the very last night as I came home, and saw that cursed candle burning in your window, that I would tell Lilla, and insist upon making an end of it. I would tolerate your impertinence no longer. I know it would vex her to part with you.— You have managed to wheedle yourself into such high favour,—probably by whispering lies against her husband,—that's the way with your duennas, everybody knows—but now, without troubling your mistress upon the subject, I tell you at once, this house you quit, and I desire it may be done within two hours and, if you can get away without seeing your mistress, why all the better—for it will save a marvellous deal of crying.'

“ ‘No, sir,’ I said, ‘I must see my mistress before I go. Go, I shall; nothing on earth should tempt me to stay, after the treatment I have met with from you. I intended for the best, you know I did, sir; and that I am incapable of whispering one word to your disadvantage to my mistress,—but, as I am

suspected of such meanness, nothing should tempt me to stay. Farewell, then, sir; farewell, Mr. Daubeney, but——’ I was going to the door, deeply offended,—I had already my hand upon the lock, but my heart smote me,—I returned again to the bed-side, and said, fervently, ‘Do not, do not ruin them all,—Yourself, yourself, too,—so young and promising,—but for this one desperate crime! Oh, Valentine! Oh, Mr. Daubeney!’

“Whether my appeal had any effect upon him, I know not. He turned suddenly upon his bed, for he had thrown himself on it again, and hid his face entirely from me. I stood, fixed as a statue, looking at him, for a little while, without power to move. I longed to say something more, but he seemed resolved not to give me the opportunity, he lay there obstinately silent and motionless.

“At last, perceiving that I did not go away, he turned again suddenly round, and, looking me full in the face, said,

“‘You heard my orders, I presume?’

“‘Yes, sir.’

“ ‘You leave this house in two hours, and if you see your mistress you must and will, go and get it done at once, and let us hear no more of you.’ ”

“ I never heard anything so absurd as your conduct,” cried Mr. Craiglethorpe, as if losing all patience; “this is the way, you romantic, ridiculous women always do. You must be meddling and making,—fancying your power for good or evil so much greater, and your interference, this way or that, of so much more consequence than it really is. Why could you not have held your tongue, and kept your place? It was likely that, where his father’s remonstrances had failed, yours should be of any use!—likely, indeed! But you must put in your word,—All women must. And so you got turned out, neck and heels,—as who would not have expected you would,—And the poor young creature was left without a friend! And in her situation, too! for you mean, of course, she was with child?”

“ Yes, sir, of a boy, who was born some

two months after I left her. Did you never hear that she had a boy?"

"Oh!" cried he, starting up vehemently, "what have I heard, and what have I not heard! I forget,—yes, yes,—now I recollect: when the house broke, at last, and she was driven almost into the streets,—and her husband lay at the Fleet, I know not how long;—yes,—yes, now I recollect hearing there was a boy——"

He sat down again.

"Why did I suffer you to tell me this story?" he began again, clasping his hands over his head; "what had I to do to recall those years,—so long,—so long gone by? Why, when a life has elapsed since this, cannot one forget! Why, when it is so long,—so long ago,—can recollection so freshly be revived! Years have passed away since then,—A new life, a new world,—The wide ocean has rolled between those days and me!—Why could it not obliterate?"

"Oh, why," he went on, for he was dreadfully excited,—“why is life not written upon

the sands, that the waves may pass over and efface the past,—it is irrevocable to alter, and misery to recall! Why is what we have done written with a pen of iron, as upon a rock, when the ineffaceable characters are useless! Years have elapsed since all this was; and there it remains fresh as if the scenes were of yesterday—Yes, Mrs. Benfield, as if of yesterday! Your story brings all back. That sweet girl committed to my care!—all her winning, innocent ways,—her miserable fate! and my hard, cruel, vengeful heart——

“Mrs. Benfield, I once saw a wounded viper turn on himself, and destroy his life with his own venom.—He stung himself to death. The revengeful feelings of my heart have done the same for me.

“But go on. Well—it’s well—you forsook her. You forsook her—It was a miserable thing to do,—but you did it. Yet I think, when the ruin fell upon her,—when she was almost a beggar, as I understand she was,—you might have come to her again, in spite of that young scoundrel’s behaviour. But you

never did,—you were still harder than I was, —for you loved her, and you knew she loved you.”

“I could not go back, sir; I was far away at the time,—I was in the Levant myself.”

“What took you there?”

“I was married, sir.”

“Hey day!”

“There was one who had loved me long and faithfully, but I had someway not cared for him in return. This man was an old clerk in Mr. Daubeney’s House, who had been employed by him years before in business connected with Mr. Fleming’s House, and had been on that account in the Levant. There we first met. The acquaintance was renewed in England, but I loved my mistress, and I did not love him, and I would not leave her.

“Now, however, driven out of the house, I was . . . to own the truth, sir, when I came to part from my young mistress, who had been to me as a child, whatever the cause might be, I thought she did not show the feeling I had expected. Whether she was in

secret glad to get rid of me—because, you know, there is something in people which makes them dread to have their eyes opened, and fear those who they think will do it ; or, whether young Mr. Daubeney had succeeded in setting her against me, I cannot tell ; but certainly I was hurt at the way she took my leaving her, and my heart felt very sore and very lonely. I went about for comfort as one naturally does, and it was natural that I should recollect the true and faithful love that plain, honest heart had so long borne me.

“ He loved me, sir ; and when others are unkind, we feel of what value it is to be truly loved. Be the lover who or what he may, so it is. But I do not mean to disparage him by what I have said. A plain man may be better than many a more specious one. In short, sir, when he heard what had happened, who but he should fly to me, and proffer himself once more to my acceptance, and in such a frank, feeling, generous manner, that I took him at his word, and we were married in a week or two. And how it came to pass I was

never exactly told, but I guessed ;—young Mr. Valentine probably thought me too near him still. Be that as it may, certain it is my husband was, shortly after his marriage, again sent abroad, and I, as in duty bound, accompanied him.

“ Abroad we remained some years. Two or three passed before the news of Mr. Daubeney’s bankruptcy, and of the death of the old man, which followed almost immediately, reached us. Then followed the intelligence of his wife’s death six weeks after his own.

“ The assignees of the estate kept my husband in the situation he was then occupying till affairs were wound up ; and this detained us at Beyrout for two or three years more. It was about nine years after the bankruptcy when we returned to England, and the whole had by that time become an old story. The affairs had been almost entirely wound up, though they were of so extensive a nature that some few things yet remained unsettled ; and some property undisposed of. Among the latter was this large, handsome house.

“Fashions had altered since it had been built, and merchants no longer chose to reside in the City. Who would purchase such an extensive dwelling—select such an out-of-the-way place? It was let as a sort of warehouse, and the assignees gave me and my husband the care of it. He having some money, contrived to purchase the small public-house in that back-street by which you entered, and to connect it with this mansion in the way you saw; and upon our offering to rent the upper rooms we were allowed them. Young gentlemen are glad to be out of the way, you know, sir, at times; and where could they be in a more retired or decent place than this? Our rent is rather high, and our gains but scanty; but *my* heart yearns to the place, and, indeed, so does that of my husband; and rather than leave it”

“Well—well; is this never to end? Enough of the house! Did you ever see the woman—did you ever see Lilla again?”

“No, sir—Not a trace of her did I ever discover.

“The last I heard of her was, that her husband was thrown into the Fleet, and that she followed him there with her little boy. I was told, too, that he died in that place, and was buried in the churchyard hard by—a poor debtor’s funeral. There was no Insolvent Act in those days, sir; the grave was the only passage by which most of the poor debtors were liberated. What became of her afterwards nobody knew.

“You may be sure I went to the prison and made every inquiry. I was shown the room which young Daubeney had occupied, for the name was not yet forgotten. It was a well-known name, and besides, he was so remarkable a person. It was a little, close, wretched room, and in it he died.

“Some of those poor debtors recollected him well, and could tell of his emaciated looks—his feverish, almost insane eyes—his trembling hands and uncertain gait; and of a pale and beautiful young woman, who was always at his side—and of a boy, who came into that prison a child of three years old, and went out

of it a thin, pale boy, between seven and eight—a poor, weedy, drawn-up plant—etiolated, as they say, in that sickly, sunless air.

“There were women there who loved to talk of them—

“Of her patient, dovelike, uncomplaining sweetness; of his horrible despair. How he would, in his pains of body and mind, be irritable and restless; and how she would soothe and calm him—whispering words of patience and submission to the lot they had drawn upon themselves. How she might be seen upon her knees, with her own delicate hands scouring the floor—or standing mopping the steps before their door—or rubbing their old furniture to make it bright and clean—or watering two roses and a geranium which she had in the window—or plying her needle busily, for upon what she gained by that they subsisted.

“Going about every day in that bad and miserable place, like an angel of mercy and goodness, shedding light and breathing peace and hope wherever she went. Were any sick,

who but Mrs. Daubeney was at their side, smoothing their pillows—administering their medicines ; and far more, sitting down and talking to them so wisely and kindly, teaching them to be patient and resigned ? Oh, sir, that patience is a holy oil poured over many a rankling wound. She would bid them to trust in God—that God who was leading them all through the valley of darkness and the shadow of death, but who would never leave them nor forsake them ; and of that Saviour who had bowed his mighty head to agony and death for their dear sake. She would speak with tears of that great love which overlooked not the most wretched or the least, but would in good time remember them when tears should be washed from all faces.

“So these poor creatures related it to me whilst tears ran down their cheeks as they talked of her.

“They told me that her husband grew worse and worse, more restless and more irritable every day ; and people whispered about that he was mad. But this she implored them not

to think or say, lest he should be carried away to Bedlam. And so the more restless and incapable he grew, the more she shut herself up with him, so that at last she was seldom seen, except when she went out of the prison walls for a short time now and then, with that poor, sickly boy in her hand, to get a few things she wanted. And whilst she was away, the door of her room was kept locked, and no one could go in; but those who went by sometimes heard such groans! and some said dreadful sounds, as of one dashing himself against the floor or wall. Those tales got about.

“And one woman told me how she chanced one day to be passing by, as Mrs. Daubeney and her little boy came up in a sort of hurry and did not perceive her, and how she saw Mrs. Daubeney unlock the door, and was curious—there were strange stories afloat—to look in; and how there he sat with his hair all standing as it were on end, and his eyes with a wild look of despair, and his hands clenched in his locks, which were curly still, though almost

grey ; and how she saw her go up to him, and take his hand out of his hair so gently, and say, in that sweet, soft voice of hers,—

“ ‘Oh, my own Valentine, be patient.’ ”

“ And how another woman going in one day, saw quite an affecting scene. Mr. Daubeney asleep upon his bed, and a white handkerchief laid over his face to keep the flies off, for it was summer, and there are such swarms of them in that place ; and the window open, and those three little trees on the window sill. She, dressed in a gown patched in all places, but not a hole in it, was working at her needle ; and that pale boy was standing beside her, threading her needles as she wanted them, and singing this Psalm, which he had learned by heart out of her Prayer Book :—

“ The Lord my Shepherd is,
I shall be well supplied.”

“ She had her Bible and her Prayer-book, that was all she had left. Every little superfluity she brought with her into the prison had been sold one by one to get food. For you

must know, sir, in those days—God grant it be not so now—they shut up debtors between four walls, and left them to provide themselves with food; and God help the poor creatures who were friendless—they were often starving. And had it not been for their poor brothers in calamity, who often shared with them what they could ill spare, many must have actually starved. This creature, sir, this angel has been known, after giving her husband and her son their breakfasts, to steal out under some pretence or other with her own share of the bread, and give it to one of these hungering wretches.”

The last part of Mrs. Benfield's long history was listened to with profound attention and in perfect silence—the whole man so absorbed that he scarcely moved. As she proceeded his face began to change, the colour rose to his cheek, and his breast began to heave; then his hand stole to his eye, and wiped away first one and then another tear. Not, after all, bitter tears. This lovely picture of goodness in her he loved made his heart glow with sen-

sations new, but in spite of all, delightful. He forgot himself, he forgot all in the ecstasy of that admiration.

Mr. Craiglethorpe was an altered man.

“And what—what,” at last he faltered out, “what did you say became of her? And how did it all end?”

“In the poor young man’s death at last. A hollow short cough; a cheek flushed with bright colour—emaciation, till the very bones pierced his skin as he lay upon that wretched bed, and then his death—yes, death came at last.”

“She sat by him and held his hand, and moistened his parched lips, and now and then tears would roll quietly down her cheeks; and she kneeled down and read the prayers for the dying, and commended the soul of the sufferer, in faith, to God.

“For there was her Redeemer, sir,—He, who died for the sinful and the miserable, and she trusted in his mercy upon this poor soul. You know he had suffered much in expiation before he departed. Then, when the last

struggle was over, and he had gone to his place, she closed his eyes, and when he was decently laid out, she went and laid herself upon a little couch by the side of her boy, who was fast asleep, and threw her arms round his neck, and laid her pale cheek to his pale cheek, and so she fell asleep.

“It was the sleep of the blessed, for that task was done. He was gone to God as she hoped—his errors forgiven for his Saviour’s sake—and she was left with her orphan boy. But there was the Father of the fatherless above.”

CHAPTER XI.

“I read the revelations of the heart,
By the great Angels, Life and Time revealed.”

READE.

MRS. BENFIELD stopped, for her tears fell so fast that she could hardly speak; but Mr. Craiglethorpe spoke not.

His attitude of fixed attention, however, spoke for him that he wished her to go on, and by-and-by she was able to go on.

“It was the very woman who sat up with the corpse that night who told me all this.

“The next evening it was carried away.

“The dear young lady had an old black gown by her, it seems, for she put one on; and with her little boy in her hand, she followed the hearse as it went out of the gate; and that is the last that was seen of her. She left orders that the little property she had should be sold to pay a few trifling debts; and if any money was left, that it should be laid out in bread for those who needed it.”

“And nothing was ever heard of her more?”

“Nothing.”

“And you tried every means to trace her?”

“Did I not?”

“And all in vain?”

“All in vain.”

“Oh! wretch—wretch—wretch—miserable wretch that I was! And I was rolling in wealth and grovelling in sensuality, and teaching my hard, hard heart to forget her, asking myself what affair it was of mine? She had despised my counsel and shaken off my authority, and what had I to do with her? She had chosen for herself, and by that choice she must abide.

Oh, fool ! fool ! fool ! and blind. Oh, fool ! fool !”

“But what did they *think* had become of her?”

“Some thought she had destroyed herself—she went out with such a pale, calm, resolute face, they said, but I never believed *that*.”

“Nor more do I.”

If there be one thing more dreadful than another to endure, I have always thought it must be to lose sight of a friend under terrible circumstances, and never to know what has become of him. To know he must have suffered, but as to how and to what extent, to know nothing. Imagination shudders at the sufferings that may have been gone through, but all is horrible conjecture, and no more. Upon that rack of busy creative misery of thought—Mr. Craiglethorpe found himself now stretched,

and his anguish exceeds description. His face became red, his eyes stared. He rose from his seat as if something suddenly became visible, then sat down again, the cold sweat starting in drops from his brow. He wiped the moisture away—he rose and went to the door,—he came back, sat down opposite to Mrs. Benfield, as if more was to be told; then almost wild with the horror of his conjectures, his hands clasped, he walked almost furiously up and down the room. Remorse, the agony of remorse, lent stings to the bitterness of his sorrow.

To forgive himself was impossible.

Some men might have palliated the matter even yet to themselves, but he attempted it not.

True, she had never applied to him. True, from the day he had refused to be present at her marriage, had surrendered his authority as regarded her affairs, and declined to take any further part in her concerns, she had never attempted to hold the least communication with him. Mrs. Selwyn having gone abroad to join her husband soon after Lilla's mar-

riage, every avenue had been closed by which he might have heard of her. True, he had never had the least conception of the extremities to which she had been reduced. These things might have been urged as some excuse for his conduct, but it would not do.

Certain looks of sad surprise—a sort of childish surprise at his anger and unkindness—certain tones of voice could not be forgotten. Now they haunted him as did the recollection of his own proud and implacable feelings.

True, she had not applied to him in her distress ; but need he, therefore, have been ignorant of it ?

Had not the tale of the ruin of Mr. Daubenev's house reached him ? had he not heard of the affecting death of that good old man, so speedily followed by that of his wife ? Had he not heard of the disgrace and imprisonment of the son ? He did not know that she was penniless, but he did know that she was a friendless stranger.

And what had he done ?

In the bitterness of his heart, he had driven

the recollection of her as much as possible from his mind ; had waited to be applied to, resolved not to interfere unasked ; had suffered the busy present to sweep by him as a flood, and obliterate the trace of old friendships, old relations, old obligations.

And now it was too late.

No notice in the newspapers, it must be said, had apprized him of Valentine's death, for I think, if he had known *that*, he must and would have relented ; for his jealousy,—that strongest, perhaps, of man's passions,—would have ceased to add its poison to the rest. But such thoughts offered no palliation to him now. The picture of Lilla, as she left the Fleet prison, was not to be driven from his mind.

After a good while had elapsed, during which Mrs. Benfield had sat there, looking down, and the big tears rolling silently down her cheeks, she at last lifted up her eyes, and fixing them upon Mr. Craiglethorpe, became

aware of those changes of countenance which betrayed the anguish of his mind.

She sat watching him some time with much compassion in her looks. At last, seeing he did not speak, she went on with her relation, without being asked to do so, conscious that she was doing the best thing to divert him from the cruel thoughts with which he seemed filled :—

“ We took possession of this house, sir, as I have related to you, and I have something, in consequence of this, to add to my story, which I have never communicated to any one before, but which I think,—I feel,—I think I see,—nay, I feel sure, ought to be mentioned to you ; and I believe, indeed, seeing the distress which you appear to suffer upon this poor young lady’s account, it may be a comfort to you. Indeed, sir, I had no idea,—we none of us had the least idea,—that you could have felt so much for her,—or, indeed, for any one. Pray excuse me.”

He did not interrupt her, impatiently, as as he had done before ; the man within

seemed to quail, subdued and broken with the intensity of his distress. He was patient with this kind, but somewhat tedious woman, because he had not spirits left to be impatient. She went on:—

“ There was some of the old furniture remaining when we came into the house, and I was told to take care to look through the drawers, and scrutoires, and so on, before any of it was disposed of.

“ A man came one day to bid for that old carved cabinet you see there, sir. It's rather a curious piece of work, if you observe, beautifully carved,—the story of Venus and Adonis, I believe. You see, sir, what a rich ornamental work of fruit and flowers there is round the pannels, and how handsome and heavy the cornice at the top is.”

He turned round, as it were, almost mechanically, and looked at the piece of furniture she described. It was one of those rich old pieces of dark, carved oak, which, a few years ago, used to be cast aside into the corners of

pawn-brokers' shops, and which now every one seizes upon and prizes.

"The man," she went on, "would not give the price my husband put upon it, and the cabinet has remained unsold ever since.

"There is the key," she continued, taking from her pocket a richly-worked silver key, and laying it, with a certain solemnity, upon the table before her.

"That cabinet was an interesting piece of furniture to me. I had known it long. It had belonged to Mr. Fleming, and my dear young lady would never part with it. She had brought it from the Levant with her. It used to stand in her bed-room at Mrs. Selwyn's house, and after her marriage, it must needs go with her, and wherever she went, and be placed in her bed-room.

"This key is very precious to me, sir. It used to hang round my darling young lady's neck, fastened with a silver chain."

He continued to look at the cabinet, never

once turning his eyes from it, yet listening attentively to what was coming next.

“ My young lady, perhaps you did not know, was in the habit of writing a good deal by herself. I think this is a habit not uncommon with young people who have no intimate friend to open their heart to ; they like to talk, as it were, in this manner, with themselves.

“ Well, sir, I had taken no thought of this, after the sad break-up ; and had never troubled myself to inquire what had become of her papers—whether she had destroyed them, or into whose hands they had fallen—till they talked of selling this cabinet, and I had to look through it. These old-fashioned things have usually all sorts of curious secret drawers in them, but I was well acquainted with this, for she had no secrets of this sort for me, trusting me,—poor thing, she was but too trustful—implicitly. In a secret drawer at the back I found the papers.”

“ And what have you done with them ? Destroyed them ? You dare not ! ”

“No, sir; I could not find in my heart to do it.

“There is something,” she went on, “in destroying papers which reveal the thoughts and feelings of those who are gone, so like annihilation, that it is an awful thing to do. One revolts at the idea of burying in eternal oblivion these living monuments of what was once a human soul—of irretrievably obliterating the precious relics of thought and feeling.—To destroy what can never be replaced, has always seemed a fearful thing to me.”

“What did you do with them, then? Are they there still?” Half rising as if to go to the cabinet, and at the same time stretching out his hand as if for the key.

“No, sir, they are not there.

“My life is uncertain. I am well aware, that in the present state of my health, I may be confined to a sick-bed, nay, I may die any day. This cabinet might be sold.”

“Yes,” said Craiglethorpe, “it will be. I shall buy it.”

“And if I happened to be ill, and it had

gone without my knowledge, I could not bear the idea of the papers being left to the chance of going with it, and so passing into other hands. I took them out—have sealed them up in a parcel—and have ordered them to be destroyed at my death.”

“I thought you said you did not like to burn those sort of papers?”

“I could not do it myself, I own ; but a glance at their contents showed me that they ought not to fall into indifferent hands.”

“Have you read them?”

“No, sir, I have not. A glance into the first pages showed me that one person alone ought to read them, and that person is yourself.”

“I !”

“You, sir ; for your name is the principal one there.”

“What could she write of me ? How came she to think of me ?” he cried, with emotion, “You do not mean to say—you cannot mean to imply——Oh ! if she wrote of me, it could be only to ridicule and curse me.”

“ Ah, sir,” said Mrs. Benfield, and she looked earnestly into his face, “ Why—why were you in such a delusion ? Oh, me ! Why was not that which is now to be made known, guessed at before ? ”

“ You intend to let me read these papers, then.—Where are they ? ”

“ I will fetch them.”

She rose with some difficulty. She was very feeble, and this long conversation had evidently exhausted her very much.

The clocks upon the neighbouring churches were ringing the half hour past four—the chimes of a tower almost close at hand, played the melancholy air of Gramachree. In the very heart of the great, bustling city, all around them was still—there was not a sound to be heard in this secluded room, but the stilly distant roar like a torrent for ever flowing. It was a dull, lowering day. The clouds hung low and heavy, the atmosphere was sultry and oppressive ; the room in which they sat looked as if darkened with almost supernatural gloom ; the breakfast things stood there till unheeded upon the table.

Mrs. Benfield rose from her seat slowly, and with a certain gravity as if about to do some solemn thing ; then, with that feeling of ceremony which seems inseparable from human nature upon all great occasions, it appears that when she left the room, she gave orders to clear the forgotten breakfast things away before introducing these papers, which were to her as the holy relics of one she honoured as a saint.

While she was absent, a woman-servant came in and cleared the table unobserved by Mr. Craiglethorpe, who was standing at some little distance with his back to the door. He was looking at the cabinet, and seemed intent upon the story of Venus and Adonis which was carved upon it. Was it his fancy—or was it really so ? The figures reminded him of Lilla and Valentine.

The beautiful youth was in one pannel represented as starting for the chase, his fair curls clustering round his face, just as those of Valentine had used to do ; and the long beautiful arms of the goddess were thrown round

him, as if to detain him. Her sweet face cast up imploringly and melancholy, as he had seen that of Lilla—but not when directed to Valentine—and had been puzzled to understand its meaning. How beautiful were the dogs as they strove impatiently to be away! and the young huntsman struggling to disengage himself from these tender arms!

In another pannel Adonis was dying. That young and beautiful youth was dying at her feet. He fancied he saw the picture realized which his fancy had painted, and in the loving, piteous expression of the immortal one's face, again he beheld that of her on whom he had so madly doted.

How long he stood engaged in these contemplations I know not,—he was aroused by the door opening, and turning round, saw that the table had been cleared, and the little disorder of the room arranged. It looked, as I said, almost as if some ceremony was about to take place. Mrs. Benfield re-entered. She carried in her hand a painted box of pretty considerable size, which was adorned upon the

outside with paintings that covered it almost all over.

The patterns of trailing flowers, interspersed with ribbons and true-lovers' knots, were not of modern taste ; time had faded the colours, and the varnish had become yellow and cracked, but enough remained to show that this had once been an elaborate work of art ; and the lock, the handle at the top, and all the little fittings proved that no expense had been spared upon this little repository.

Sitting down by the table, Mrs. Benfield sighed and said :—

“This pretty box was painted for me, and given to me by my dear Miss Fleming in days when she was happy, and loved to amuse herself with such little things. It has been a great treasure to me, and when I got these papers, I thought the best use I could make of it was to put them in here.”

So saying, she lifted a black ribbon that hung about her neck, and took out a very small silver key inlaid and worked with gold, and applying it to the lock, opened the box.

He had resumed his seat, and sat watching her attentively.

The box was lined with pink silk which had long been faded, it contained nothing but the papers ; these papers being put up together in a cover which was sealed, and upon which these words were written :—" To be burned unopened in case of my death." Mrs. Benfield broke the seal, and then the manuscript appeared. It was in packets of different descriptions. Some being those of the earlier date, were nicely tied together with ribbons, in a sort of small volume, and were composed of delicately prepared paper now discoloured by time. The handwriting, however, was various, sometimes delicate and even, at others hurried and scrawling, as if written under the influence of strong passion.

The papers of a later date were of a commoner material, degenerating at last into mere scraps and fragments of the coarsest and most ordinary kind. A change in the character of the hand-writing was remarkable here. Neither the delicate penmanship, nor the hurried scrawls of the earlier papers were discernible.

The hand had acquired more regularity and firmness. It was larger, and the letters better formed. There, one might almost say, seemed to be a certain solemnity,—gravity,—melancholy in it.

As Mrs. Benfield took the packets out one by one, and as she laid them before Mr. Craiglethorpe, she said :—

“I have never presumed to read further than the first few pages of these writings. I could proceed no further without meeting with the name of another, and as I hinted to you before, sir, that other was the only person to whom such a confidence ought to be made. It was not for me to pry into the secrets of the dead. It was not for me to know their weaknesses or their mistakes. There was one name, too often repeated. For these many years I have thought that its possessor was dead, too, but it seems I was mistaken.”

“You have acted rightly—give me the papers.”

She presented them to him.

“I am afraid the parcel will cause you much

pain—If I interpreted these things rightly—there has been much mistake”

He was already glancing his eye over them.

Not in a hasty, greedy, impatient manner, like one who expects delight and satisfaction, but with something approaching to horror and dread; overmastered by the intense, the invincible desire to hold that fresh communication with the lost which arises from the perusal in this manner of their secret thoughts.

“Perhaps it will give you too much pain; perhaps you had better let it alone, sir,” reiterated she, looking compassionately at his working features.

“No,” said he, with a slight shake of the head.

“You will like best to read them by yourself,” she added, rising with her usual delicacy of feeling.

“Thank you ; I should much.”

“You will please to return them to the box when you have finished them, and give me the key.”

“Undoubtedly.”

Mrs. Benfield left the room.

He sat down—sank down, into the huge old arm-chair. His hand shook; he could scarcely hold the papers; he kept gazing at them vacantly. Sometimes he bent down, and looked intently at that delicate hand-writing; then he covered his eyes with his hand, and turned away.

But you are impatient, perhaps, to learn the internal workings of the unhappy Lilla Fleming's heart, as related by herself in this unsophisticated manner.

Upon the outside leaf of the first little volume was inscribed, in a beautiful hand-writing, carefully and neatly penned, this title :—

“The Secret History of the Head and Heart of Lilla Fleming.”

He turned the manuscript round, looking at the knots of ribbon with which the volume was tied, and at the silken cord and tarnished little silver tassel at the end, which had been inserted to keep the place.

Such was the little womanly fancy which

had adorned the first collection of papers. There were others, as I have said, far less daintily arranged—others—breathing the passion, the woe, of a later period. Hastily scribbled down without care, in the intervals of anguish, they had been—they were begrimed with dust, and wetted, and blotted with tears.

CHAPTER XII.

“Faint as records graved upon
Fragments of some mouldering stone,
With grey weed and moss o’ergrown
When the tale they told is gone.”

READE, *Vision of the Ancient Kings*.

I SHALL not give you the whole of what he read. In manuscripts of this nature there is necessarily much that is mere repetition, and a good deal that relates to events trifling and uninteresting, as having left no permanent trace in the writer’s feelings. I shall confine myself to those which bore upon the main-spring of the history of a warm and feeling heart. They were read, I might say devoured, by Mr. Craiglethorpe with such inten-

sity of interest, and were the only ones that bear upon my story.

“*The Lawn, May 15th, 18**.*

“Which said Lawn, be it said, is situated in a certain district named in England—to which I am come—a Forest !

“Epping Forest ! Very unlike, by-the-by, any forest I have ever seen or heard ; of being a pretty, open, glady sort of tree-ed country, full of very gay villas, and very fine houses, and very small carriages,—young ladies and gentlemen, and all that sort of thing.

“Well, but these lucubrations of mine which are to be, are thence dated.

“It is an old foolish habit of mine, perhaps, this writing down my thoughts, and talking to myself ; yet I will not say that neither, for it was my dear father who recommended the practice to me.

“He said that as I had neither brother nor sister, nor kith nor kin, nor even very intimate

friend, to tell me disagreeable truths, and to exchange my ideas with, in the perfect confidence so natural to young minds, I must make a friend, a censor, and a confidant of myself. And, that, if I were accustomed thus to put down my thoughts upon paper, it would enable me to hold a sort of conversation, as it were, between me and myself, which I might turn to profit. I should in that way, in a certain sense, look at my character as from a distance ; something as another person might look upon it. I remember he smiled in his dear manner, and added he feared it would prove but a poor substitute for a sensible friend—this poor little foolish inexperienced second self ; but such as it was, he recommended it.

“ I have burned all the lucubrations of Beyrout. I fancied, that act of my life having closed, I might as well have done with the relation of childish notions, wishes, and follies. A new chapter in the portentous volume, that we call our personal experience, so portentous to ourselves, so valueless to others, is now opened,—a new page is to be read.

The chapter, I have a feeling, is *already* written, though, done in sympathetic ink, it will only, by degrees, become visible to my eyes.

“Ah! could I gratify the invincible curiosity I have to read it now! It will be so new,—so different from the old one. Will it be as happy? I really feel as if I scarcely cared for that, provided it was interesting; and that it can hardly fail to be where everything is so strange.

“How sad I have felt during my voyage! How terrible it has been to me to leave my native land; that beautiful land of the sun,—of dark azure skies,—of brilliant lights and deep shadows—of palms, and cedars, and roses, and nightingales; of orange-blossoms, and fountains, and for England!

“England! which they all say is covered with nasty dark clouds and fog, from one year’s end to the other, and where, when the sun shines, it is so pale that neither plants, nor birds, nor flowers, can take a colour.—Where the very nightingales sing hoarsely, and with

none of that passionate sweetness which delights me so much here.

“Such was the way I was thinking when I left the lovely land, and stepped upon the deck of the vessel which was to carry me away. I cried and felt so lonely.—And my father!—my dear, dear father! But I did not leave his revered remains behind.—They were gone to England before me. That it was which made me, after all, feel that England *was* my country.

“It was not till I got into the Channel,—the Chops of the Channel as the seamen called it,—it was not till I got there, that I felt I had fairly bidden adieu to the fair South.

“Oh, how cold it was! oh, how it blew! and how the wind seemed to pierce into my very bones!

“And yet somehow I did not dislike it; Selina was ready to cry, and good Mrs. Benfield said, “Well, we’re getting to England, you may feel that,” in a way that showed she felt rather particularly uncomfortable, but I liked it.

“I liked that shivering feel; I liked to hear the wind whistling among the shrouds. I

liked to wrap myself up in a great fur cloak, that Mrs. Benfield had provided for me, and to walk upon the deck and enjoy the bracing air, as the captain called it.

“ I like that captain. He is rather a rough specimen of a seaman, but he’s very frank, honest, and good-natured,—so *English* as I fancy. I can’t think how it happens that I am so fond of what is rather rough, provided it be honest and good-natured. I like it much better, really better, than soft and smooth. My taste in people seems all in the rock way.

“How proud and pleased the captain and all the sailors seemed when we got into the Thames! The highway of nations the captain called it; and said the port of London was the most important port, and London itself the greatest, and the mightiest, and the richest city in the world; and that, except one rascal—Wat Tyler, I think he called him—no one since

eight hundred years, had ever dared enter it in a hostile manner.

“So he kept plying me with fine stories about the wealth and grandeur of London, till I did not know what to expect. Nothing but castles and palaces, I believe, crowning the banks of the river, and their fine gardens coming sweeping down to it.

“It was a beautiful sight, certainly, as we sailed up, and came opposite a place they call Northfleet. There, upon the south side, the banks, all covered with trees, came quite down to the water.

“It was a beautiful day; the sun *does* shine in this country, say what they will. The river gleamed so blue and clear, and the little waves broke and foamed against the sides of the vessels which were careering up in crowds; like flocks of sea-birds with their white wings spread, scudding so triumphantly before the wind. And white clouds skimmed across the lovely pale blue sky, and the wind was so fresh and delightful, I was quite enchanted.

“ But, oh ! never poor mortal creature fell from a greater pinnacle of imagination into a more horrible depth than did poor I, as we approached this queen of cities. Was it possible to conceive anything so utterly abominable, as the misty black buildings, coming tumbling head over heels into the river, in every sort of hideous form, colour, and proportion?—no quays, no palaces, not even fine warehouses.

“ Is this the city which exalted herself as a queen ?

“ Ah ! thought I. If the people I am going to be with are as far beneath my dear father—as far below all his excellence has led me to hope from his countrymen—as this abominable London is beneath its reputation—what will become of me ?

“ And really, when I first saw Mr. Craighthorpe coming upon the deck, where we at last stopped in a horrid place all full of black coal vessels, and the water the colour of Styx, I thought it was just going to be so. He was so excessively ugly.

“Conceive of a man, with a skin the colour of yellow parchment, and a high thin nose, and a forehead, wrinkled like an old man’s forehead, and a face all straight lines, and a thin wasted sort of figure, all straight lines, and an eye, not sweet and bright—as eyes ought to be—but sharp, and cold, and piercing as that of a hawk.

“An eye one can’t help looking at askance, and can’t help being afraid of. And yet, would any one believe it? No, it’s impossible they should. I thought him, as I thought London, the ugliest thing I had ever seen. And I hated London—but I rather *likea* him. Yes, I did—An example of my old strange taste for what is rough and ugly.

“And yet my father, whom I loved to adoration, was neither rough *nor* ugly.

“But I was so sick of the men at Beyrout. They were so false and so smiling. I believe I mistake the reverse of wrong for right, and fancy what is rough and ugly must be faithful and sincere—that’s it—and strong, and manly, and protecting—that’s it again.

“And there is something in Mr. Craiglethorpe so *true*,—so utterly without affectation,—so totally indifferent to,—so entirely without thought of the effect he is producing—or any endeavour to render himself pleasing, or that sort of thing! So downright—so downrightly straightforward, almost to rudeness. So cold and quiet!—Ah! perhaps so insensible!—that, say what I will—laugh at myself as I will—do what I will—I must own it is excessively to my taste.

“It’s no use being ashamed of one’s taste in these things—taste will have its way.—It will not brook contradiction, it will not listen to argument—and wrong or right, this taste *is* mine.

“How oddly I felt when he came up to me!—What a curious sort of liking I took to him at first sight!

“Nay, I declare, if he had not been so hideously ugly, I should have thought I had fallen in love at first sight.—A thing my dearest father used always to ridicule and warn me against, as the most contemptible and dangerous weakness of which a woman could be guilty.

“Well, this thing I am glad of, that this Mr. Craiglethorpe is to be my guardian—for I am sure I shall like to have to mind what he says very much—because I am certain he is a very clever, sensible, manly-minded man. And I shall have no trouble about taking care of myself, but leave it all to him; and live as thoughtlessly and pleasantly as I used to do under my dear father’s wing.

“I see he can be rather cross already—which my dear father never *could* be—but I don’t feel as if I should mind it much from him.”

The journal, after various other remarks and notices, thus, after an interval of time, went on:—

“This is a very pretty place, and I am sure I like it very much, but yet I cannot help feeling rather dull.

“Mrs. Selwyn is a very kind woman, and

very good-natured about taking me out into company and all that sort of thing. But she is not very entertaining herself, and the people we see are rather stupid.

“These great grand dinners are so tiresome. Such immense long tables, set out, I believe, for between twenty and thirty people! Such loads and loads of plate! Such heaps, and heaps, and heaps of good things to eat! More provided than twice the number of guests could by any possibility consume, though some of the gentlemen certainly seem to stuff away pretty hard!

“And then such innumerable varieties of wines, and such numbers of servants passing and handing about!

“And all for what?

“I am sure it would be hard to say.

“We put on our finest clothes. There is a little amusement in that for both of us, to be sure. I do like dressing myself, that is true, but when there is nobody one cares to please, even that is uninteresting work.

“Sometimes, however, we meet Mr. Craige-

thorpe at these dinners. His sister tells me he likes nothing so much as a great dinner ; that it is the principal pleasure of life for these City gentlemen.

“ That is strange and hard to believe.

“ Such a man as Mr. Craiglethorpe to delight in these huge, pompous, oppressive feasts !

“ Sometimes I wonder whether it is quite right. I do not think it *can* be wise, to spend the money for which people strive and toil so hard, in these ostentatious and tiresome entertainments.

“ It’s no use denying it. I cannot help thinking sometimes, what a great, great number of people would be so thankful for what is in this manner absolutely thrown away.

“ They were talking last night at Mr. Milner’s of a poor water-colour painter, who was found with a wife and six children nearly starved to death, I believe. He could not get his pictures into the Exhibition for some cause or other—I could not quite understand what—and he could not sell them.

“ Some of the gentlemen called him a poor

devil; and wondered what in the world such miserable rascals had to do to marry, upon so uncertain a prospect as water-colour drawing. They were eating, and drinking, to say nothing of sending away more upon their plates untouched than would have fed the poor painter and his family for a week.

“I was sitting by Mr. Craiglethorpe, and made a remark of this kind to him.

“He looked up at me, and smiled, one of his odd-meaning grim smiles, that I cannot help liking better than other people’s sweet ones—they seem to express so much—and he said,

“‘Miss Fleming, young gentlemen who follow the fine arts are too proud to be fed with the crumbs which fall from rich men’s tables.’

“‘I didn’t mean,’ said I, rather indignantly, ‘that he should literally have the broken meat given to him.’

“‘No! Then what has the fish and fowl, people are flinging about here, to do with the case in question?’

“‘If there were less set upon the table, there

would be less to fling about—and money might be spared to buy pictures.’

“‘And where would you put them when you had bought them?’ looking round the room, which was, indeed, covered from the ceiling downwards with pictures.

“‘Oh! I would find a place.’

“‘A woman’s answer—Oh, you would find a place! Pray understand that it is the very difficulty of finding a place for useless articles, which makes the dealing in useless articles such a precarious means of subsistence in this world.’

“‘Fine frosted castles in pastry and beautiful sugar flowers,’ I said, looking at the table, which really, it was second course now, looked quite like a feast in a fairy tale, it was so beautiful, ‘are not useless articles, it seems; I believe cooks and confectioners are never known to starve.’

“‘How should they when they live in the midst of the eatables,’ said he, with his little dry short laugh?

“‘Well, then,’ I went on, out of patience

with his way of taking such things, and looking a little contemptuously at him, I believe, for I felt an indignant kind of anger and almost contempt at his apparent indifference to the subject—I could not help that. ‘Well, then, I suppose the world is to go on from day to day in this manner. Between this ostentatious, expensive luxury upon the one hand—a luxury which does nobody any good; and this wasting misery upon the other—Dives in purple, and Lazarus at the gate. Oh! do you mean that it is to go on in this way for ever?’

“‘It is the way of the world. It ever has been, and ever will be so, I should conceive. None but a child would attempt to upheave the globe with its finger, or arrest the tide with its voice.’

“‘Do you mean that only childish people endeavour to make men better—to alter their courses when they are wrong?’

“‘A man here and there, perhaps, may be mended by a pretty girl talking about goodness to him. As for the masses, I suppose things will go on much as they ever have done, in spite of

any such powerful influence. . . . Not that the pretty girls, as far as I have observed them, are less fond of luxurious indulgence, so it may be according to their own fancy, than other people. . . . ’

“ And he glanced at my dress.

“ It was very expensive, to be sure, and I believe very pretty—but then that is so different from gormandizing at a dinner.

“ I did not pretend to mistake him, and I said something of the sort.

“ ‘ I don’t see the difference—I suppose it is only another form of selfish indulgence,’ he answered.

“ ‘ Then you think nothing of a desire to please?’

“ ‘ Woman’s excuse for vanity and coquetry.’

“ That’s the way he vexes me so often. Why will he take this pleasure in mortifying and giving me pain?

“ Does he think me a mere vain empty coquette? Is that his opinion of all women, and that his opinion of me? Why should he think this of me?

“It is natural such a young creature as I am should enjoy a little admiration, when I can get it. That’s not often done here, at all events. But does he think I would trifle with the affections of an honest heart to gratify my vanity? How little he knows me! And could he guess? but that he never, never shall—how dear his approbation would be to me—perhaps he might have the generosity, the kindness gently to put me in the way of obtaining it, and not check, and vex, and provoke me with his rude taunting ways.

“So unlike what I was used to from my dear father.

“Why must I like this strange man?

“I am sure that he saw he had hurt me.

“He looked at me for two seconds, with his piercing eye, just as if he would search into my very soul, and then with an indescribable, half-sarcastic look, which I took worst of all, returned to his dinner and ate away; taking one after another of the good things offered, as if nothing on earth was to be compared in pleasure and interest to his. I sat pouting,

looking very cross, as I felt, and refused everything—fool that I was.

“He glanced at me twice or thrice—something so provoking in his air—as if he was quite pleased to have put me out of humour. As if it were not so very easy to be ill-natured and rude. I am sure it is easy enough to him.

“But I’ll have my revenge some of these days.

“If he does not care to vex me, why should I care to vex him?

“And I know the way.

“Oh! manly and sensible as you are, Mr. Craiglethorpe, you have your weak side like other people.

“He cannot bear to be laughed at: and another thing I have found out, there is nothing he hates like being made the subject of a practical joke. He looks so ridiculously vexed, if one can but put him into a ridiculous position. Oh, that is charming! To see him looking, I don’t know how, when he finds himself victimized by any of my childish

tricks—I am sure he longs to beat me—I am positive if I were his wife he could not help beating me.

“Fool! fool! spaniel! woman! weak childish woman!

“Yes, I will own it here. Strange, unaccountable infatuation—I feel—I cannot help it—I do feel—

“That I would rather be beaten by Mr. Craiglethorpe than flattered by any other man.”

He dropped the manuscript, he clasped his forehead in his hands, and murmuring, “Oh God!” rose from his chair in the greatest agitation, his whole frame shaking with fresh paroxysms of anguish.

He saw her—She rose before him in all her innocence and playful beauty. That idol of his soul—that creature he had so passionately loved, with love which he had suffered his selfish pride thus to dishonour, and degrade, and pervert!

She had loved him, then ! loved him so—
The sweet, sweet creature had given him
that heart, that warm ingenuous heart of hers.
He could have been torn by wild horses to
obtain it, and in his hard and haughty pride
he had flung the rich treasure away.

He could have wept tears of blood, but no
tears came to relieve his burning eye-balls.

Again he rose up and took two or three
turns up and down the room, in excessive
agitation ; then he sat down, collected the
papers which lay scattered round him upon
the floor, and began to devour the manuscript
again.

There was much that followed of the same
character as what you have read.

Renewed proofs of his unkindness, and of
her sensibility to it.

Fresh marks of the interest he had made in
her heart, and records of the little mischievous
ways to which her hidden partiality had
prompted her.

Partly, it was evident, because she strove, with a woman's natural delicacy, to hide what she believed was not in the slightest degree returned ; partly because she loved to occupy herself about him.

If ever innocent affection, if ever guileless sport, if ever a strong love for what was right in herself and others, if ever all the dear woman's devotion to the man she loved, was painted in artless colours, it was portrayed here.

But as the narrative of these feelings proceeded, the page became gradually darkened. Unkindness upon unkindness, his mortifying indifference, his cutting sarcasms, began to do their work. It was evident that the slighted affection was gradually becoming alienated. The heart was striving to recover its liberty, and "yet no further than a wanton's bird," which could be summoned back by the slightest call.

But no such call was made.

Unhappy man ! The more deeply he loved, the more powerful the fascination exercised

over his affections, the more proudly did he struggle against and resist that power.

He remembered it all but too well.

How cruel ! how barbarous ! how infatuated he had been !

This conduct would have been cruel to any young creature so circumstanced.

What was it then to a heart that loved him ?

Oh, the penal fires ! the penal fires of remorse ! Remorse over this ruin of happiness ! The result of one bad master passion.

A passion never opposed, never corrected, never curbed—*his* master passion, this cruel, inexorable pride !

He gnashed his teeth ; he could have bared his bosom and torn at that hard, cruel heart of his, with his nails. Could have bitten out the tongue which had given utterance to those stinging words which now stood in fearful array before him ; recorded by that little gentle hand which evidently trembled as it wrote the unkind sentences upon pages too often blotted with her tears.

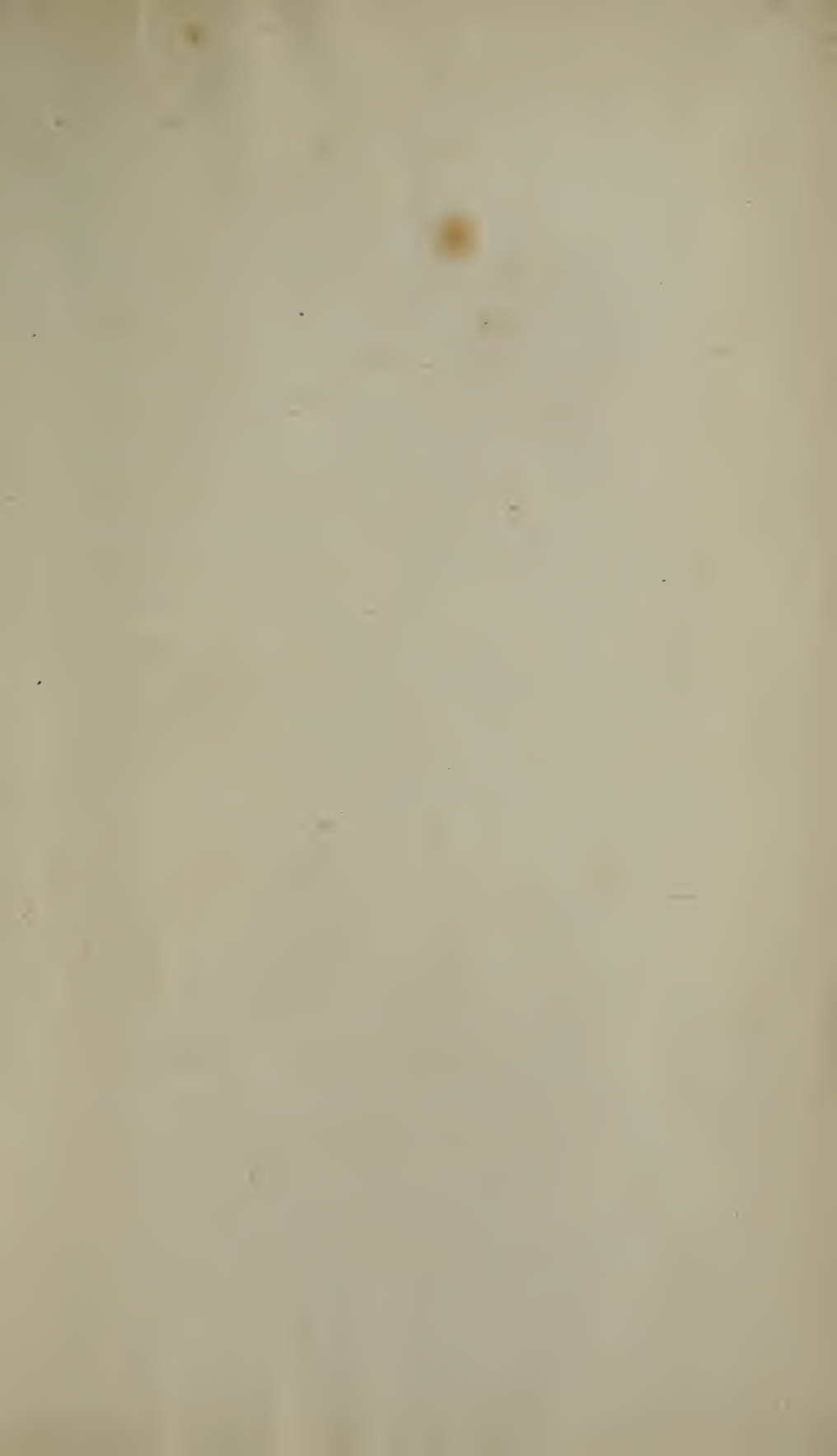
Ah, those tears! and shed for him! She loved him then! Loved him tenderly, fondly! and he, in the madness of his pride, had driven her from his bosom to take refuge—where?—

Ah, where?—The most fearful part of the history was yet to come.

He trembled, he shuddered, at that name; that blasting name; that name of one whose appearance upon the scene had, like the lightning's flash, turned all his edifice of happiness into a blackened heap of ashes—as that name—first presented itself upon the pages.

“Ah!” he cried, in his agony, “she loved me *then*! She, perhaps, loved me so, that had I but allowed her to believe I returned her affection, this dangerous enchanter would have possessed no power over her fancy. She never would have loved him had I but allowed her to love me.”

Alas! alas! he found it was even worse than that.





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